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# Experiences of Students Utilizing a Campus Food Pantry

Jamie Daugherty

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS UTILIZING  
A CAMPUS FOOD PANTRY

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
Department of Leadership, Policy and Development: Higher  
Education and P-12 Education  
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership Program

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This Dissertation by: Jamie Daugherty

Entitled: *Experiences of Students Utilizing a Campus Food Pantry*

has been approved as meeting the requirement of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, Department of Leadership, Policy and Development: Higher Education and P-12 Education, Program of Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Food insecurity is a phenomenon with far-reaching impacts on the social, economic, health, and well-being of college students' lives impacting how they procure food, food choices, and food experiences. A qualitative narrative inquiry explored experiences of three students facing food insecurity and using a campus food pantry. Data collection methods included in-depth semi-structured interviews, journaling, and photo elicitation.

Data analysis illustrated five themes: a) financial challenge identification; b) strategizing budget priorities; c) prioritizing health; d) food pantry uses and strategies; and e) having enough. Students' experiences were impacted by social and physical implications due to their financial challenges. The food pantry filled a void for all participants ensuring they had items which provided enough to meet needs. Next steps include developing a food security assessment tool, increasing department collaborations, and maximizing resource utilization provided by the food pantry. These implications are designed specifically for stakeholders invested in providing a campus food pantry to maximize students' needs and success.

Key Words: campus food pantry, food insecurity, higher education

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a faculty member of food and nutrition, I teach students the basic components of nutrition. One assignment I give, requires students to fill out a 24-hour recall, a tool used by dietitians to assess individual's daily food intake, timing of meals, where meals are eaten, with whom, and their mood when engaging in eating. About a year ago, a student noted in his food recall he had only eaten carrots at lunch. In my usual fashion, I made notes on the side bar for each student such as – "need more fruits and veggies," "where are the whole grains?", "let us talk about portions," and "redistribution of calories throughout the day." The student approached me after class and told me carrots were all he had left in his refrigerator. It was Tuesday and his paycheck would not arrive until Friday. His plan for the rest of the week was to eat more in the campus food classes, and more carrots.

Food insecurity on higher education institutions (HEIs) campuses began to interest me shortly after this encounter. Prompted by my advisor to begin reviewing literature on this topic, I found information on the prevalence, impacts, and HEIs' response to food insecurity on their campuses. This led to more questions and concerns. After reflecting on the literature, I realized how this topic bridged the worlds in which I currently reside. As faculty member, a dietitian, and a chef, I encounter students struggling with food insecurity and all its complexities. I work with students who are in

transitional housing or homeless, have only carrots to carry them through two more days, and live day-to-day wondering where they will find their next meal. When school is not in session, I wonder, what are these students eating?

Students often experience invisible struggles when accessing food. The impact food insecurity and hunger has on students as they pursue a degree influences many areas of their lives: academic, personal, physical, mental, and social, ultimately impacting persistence (Bhattacharya, Currie, & Haider, 2004; Cady, 2014; Gaines, Robb, Knol, & Sickler, 2014; Hughes, Serebryanikova, Donaldson, & Leveritt, 2011). The inability to access appropriate daily food choices reduces students' engagement and productivity, diminishing an individual's ability to learn, work, and care for themselves (Hughes et al., 2011). Food insecurity is more than a distraction (Goldrick-Rab, Broton, & Eisenberg, 2015); it alters the HEI experience and makes an already difficult transitional time near impossible for students who otherwise are motivated to change their life course. These additional stresses lead to seeking and consuming nutritionally inadequate foods due to limited resources, compared to those identifying as food secure (Mello et al., 2010).

Faculty and student affairs professionals make great efforts to develop environments supporting student success. As a faculty member, I often get frustrated with students who do not seem to "show up" to their academic responsibilities daily. I think about the difficulty I have concentrating on a given task and I am well nourished; I have access to regular, adequate food choices. After taking a step back from the literature, I approached the issue from a more developed perspective. The issue of food insecurity and hunger was apparent among my daily interactions and job responsibilities

as a faculty member at a HEI, not just hidden among words and data in another journal article. My unique background allowed me to approach this issue in a new way.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study was to make meaning of the experiences of three students who use a campus food pantry offered by a rural four-year public HEI in the Rocky Mountain region: Rocky Mountain Institution (RMI). Data collection for this study included in-depth interviews, document analysis, and photo elicitation. These methods focused on engaging with participants at RMI, while discussing their experiences and meaning they assign to various aspects of food insecurity, and their use of a campus food pantry. Exploring multidimensional aspects of food insecurity allowed for understanding of student's experiences, while addressing meaning this had on various areas of their life.

### **Students and Food Insecurity**

Food insecurity, defined as limited access to acquiring adequate food due to insufficient resources, is prevalent across the nation (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA): ERS, 2016). In 2015, 12.7 percent of United States (U.S.) households were food insecure at some time during the year (USDA: ERS, 2016). The rate of food insecurity among college students is 2-4 times greater than the national average (Coleman-Jensen, Gregory, & Singh, 2014). Much of the current data points to college and university student food insecurity prevalence on given campuses increasing in relation to the U.S. total and even state totals (Chaparro, Zaghoul, Holck, & Dobbs, 2009; Freudenberg et al., 2011; Gaines et al., 2014; Hughes et al., 2011; Martinez,

Maynard, & Ritchie, 2016; Maroto, Snelling, & Linck, 2015; Morris, Smith, Davis, & Null, 2016; Patton-Lopez, Lopez-Cevallos, Cancel-Tirado, & Vazquez, 2014). For example, per a recent student senate survey at Southern Maine Community College, 31% of students were food insecure. This number is nearly two times the state total, 16.2%, and the U.S. total, 12.7% (Pierce, 2016). The economy has an impact on these numbers. In the past, students did not juggle responsibilities such as rent, food, transportation, and childcare; many went to school part-time, not full-time (Pierce, 2016).

Today's typical student is not a recent high school graduate who lives in a residence hall receiving financial support from parents or another caregiver. Non-traditional students meet one or more of the following criteria: are over the age of 24, attend college part-time, are employed fulltime, are financially independent, must provide for dependents, are a single parent, or do not have a high school diploma (United States Department of Education (USDE): NCES, 2015). Demographics of students reporting food insecurity include some of the non-traditional characteristics (Freudenberg et al., 2011; Gaines et al., 2014; Maroto et al., 2015; Patton-Lopez et al., 2014). Many of these characteristics increase financial strains and imply an older degree-seeking student. Food insecure students are struggling with monetary costs of HEI, while balancing work, family, and meeting basic physiological needs, such as food, fluids, sleep, and housing. Students do not know where their next meal will come from or what resources may be available to them to access adequate food (Pierce, 2016).



## Definitions of Terms

The definitions of the following terms guided the context of this study: food security, food insecurity, hunger, multidimensional, temporal, food assistance, total diet, and diet quality. I also provide in Appendix A, a list of acronyms used throughout this document, to guide the reader. In 2006, the USDA introduced new language to define food security and insecurity. *Food security* refers to individuals always having access to enough food to contribute to a healthy lifestyle, implying little or no indication of changes in diet or food intake (USDA: ERS, 2016). *Food insecurity* is limited access to adequate food due to insufficient resources. This includes reports of reduced quality and variety in diet with little or no reduced food intake (USDA: ERS, 2016). It can include reports of multiple incidences of reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns, due to insufficient money and other resources for food. This indicates individuals may go hungry multiple times within a 12-month period. There can be variance within both terms depending on an individual's experience with food security or insecurity.

*Hunger* is defined as, "... a potential consequence of food insecurity that, because of prolonged, involuntary lack of food, results in discomfort, illness, weakness, or pain that goes beyond the usual uneasy sensation" (USDA: ERS, 2016). Hunger is an individual-level physiological condition which can result from food insecurity (Nord & Prell, 2007). Not all individuals who identify with food insecurity have experienced hunger.

*Multidimensional* includes having many aspects or physical dimensions (Freeland-Graves & Nitzke, 2013). It is important to understand the complexities and

tensions apparent when using this term. These aspects exhibit diverse characteristics (Freeland-Graves & Nitzke, 2013), and encapsulate the depth of the phenomenon of food insecurity. Multidimensional is used to describe the phenomenon of food insecurity.

*Temporal* or temporality allows past, present, and future or anticipated parts of an individual's experience to come to life (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). To understand an individual's lived experience with food insecurity and their use of campus food pantries, all parts of their story are crucial. These, weaved together, allow for more enhanced meaning of this experience. This term is used to describe the all-encompassing parts of individuals' stories in this study.

Food assistance services fall into several different categories, including food banks, food pantries, meal and snack programs, and other food-related outreach benefits. All programs and services provide foods and household items to those in need. Food banks are non-profit organizations acquiring foods by establishing relationships with area food retailers, distributors, and growers. Food banks provide foods via donations, government food programs, and purchased through acquired funds (Weinfield et al., 2014). Foods distributed to charitable social-service agencies provide products to clients meeting certain qualifications for this service, via grocery and meal programs in their homes or at an off-site location (Campbell, Ross, & Webb, 2013; Weinfield et al., 2014). Food-related outreach benefits include federal nutrition assistance programs, such as Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children Outreach and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Food pantries differ from food banks in that they are smaller in size and supply directly to their clientele (Hoisington,

Manore, & Raab, 2011); thus, distribution of foods is from area food banks or local donations.

*Total diet*, defined as a combination of foods and beverages providing energy and nutrients, constitutes an individual's complete dietary intake over time (USDA: CNPP, 2017). Diet quality is the adequacy of the total diet based on overall eating patterns, which include important functional benefits and adequate nutrients to meet individual's energy needs (Freeland-Graves & Nitzke, 2013). *Diet quality* is a component of food security. Regular access to poor quality food, resulting in negative health outcomes, does not provide food security (Alaimo, 2013). These terms will be used to describe characteristics of participants' diets and meal planning strategies throughout the study.

### **Research Process**

This study explored research questions through a constructivist and interpretivist blended paradigm, in which meaning is shared and socially constructed between the researcher and participant (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Interpretations via dialogue between participants and me provides understanding of the multiple constructions of meaning and intent (Crotty, 1998; Mertens, 2015). I used symbolic interactionism (SI) as the theoretical framework to provide understanding on how participants experience the world and make meaning of these experiences (Blumer, 2008); offering perspective on how individuals' meaning developed, emerged, and was modified over time. I explain this in detail at the end of this chapter.

Narrative methodology allowed me to explore the research questions, through an interpretive process, listening to voices within participant's stories. Narrative inquiries, a

spoken or written text, are usually about people's lives, interests, concerns, or passions; an account of a certain phenomenon in individual's lives (Chase, 2006). These can be short topical stories about a significant aspect of one's life or a narrative of one's entire life, from birth to present (Chase, 2006). Using this methodology, I studied and understood meaning through stories from participants about their lived and told experiences (Creswell, 2013). In doing so, voices that otherwise may have remained silent were amplified (Wang & Geale, 2015), and identification of a new possibility appeared by understanding individual's experiences (Chase, 2011).

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guide this research agenda:

- Q1     How do participants make meaning of their experience with food insecurity?
- Q2     How do participants make meaning of their experience with using a campus food pantry?
- Q2a    How do interactions with others in participants' lives influence meaning given to campus food pantries?
- Q2b    How has participants' meaning of their experience with the campus food pantry evolved over time?

The following research questions provide additional understanding surrounding how participants' make meaning of their experiences. I considered these to be sub questions to the above research questions:

- Q3     How do participants' meaning of their experience with food insecurity and the campus food pantry impact how they utilize food received in their total diet?
- Q4     How do participants' meaning of their experience with food insecurity and the campus food pantry impact their food choices and diet quality?

I asked research question #1 to gain knowledge of the day-to-day experience of participants who are food insecure and have struggles with food access. I asked research question #2 to gain understanding of what participants experience when asking for help and using a campus food pantry over time. I asked sub research question #3 to gain understanding of how meaning participants' give to their experiences impact foods or ingredients received and utilized once they use the campus food pantry. I asked sub research question #4 to gain understanding of how participants' meaning of these experiences impact food decisions and the quality of food in their diet.

### **Significance of the Study**

Food insecurity is a phenomenon with multidimensional aspects. It has far-reaching impacts on the social, economic, health, and well-being of individuals (Bickel, Nord, Price, Hamilton, & Cook, 2000). Not only can access be limited but the availability of healthy, culturally appropriate, and nutritious foods may be compromised, leaving individuals to procure food in socially unacceptable ways (Gallegos, Ramsey & Ong, 2014).

A college education can increase individual's income, allowing opportunities for more responsible financial behaviors (Robb, Moody, & Abdel-Ghany, 2012). However, many times, students must make choices between paying to take a class or working to address other financial responsibilities. If students must work to support attending school, this can add additional stress. Students with a lower income are more likely to work to cover the costs of college (Cady, 2014); often over 20 hours a week. Once students work more than 20 hours a week, grade point average (GPA) can be impacted

(Garcia-Vargas, Rizo-Baeza, & Cortes-Castell, 2016). The stress of financials and academics can affect individuals' physical and mental health (Cady, 2014). Mental health issues caused by food insecurity can be an impediment to academic success and ultimately degree completion (Martinez et al., 2016). Financial strains impact academics, mental health, and social and physical components of students' lives. These components impact how students procure food, food choices, and food experiences.

These far-reaching implications can have lasting impacts and thus students need varied assistance from HEIs. Resources implemented at campus communities, such as campus food pantries, can provide students with foods to supplement their current food budget. Currently, there is limited research on the student perspective of food insecurity, as well as how students use campus food pantries.

Stakeholders interacting with students experiencing food insecurity care about this issue due to its effect on student success, well-being, and time to degree completion (Broton, Frank, & Goldrick-Rab, 2014). Stakeholders at HEIs involved in campus food pantries can include student affairs practitioners, upper level administrators, faculty members, dining and health services, cultural centers, and various academic departments, such as business, nutrition, social work, and psychology. Additional partnerships can be formed with community members, on-campus student organizations, community engagement office, and athletics (Cohen, 2002; Student Government Resource Center, 2016). Transparency surrounding food insecurity at HEIs allows opportunities for sustainable communication and collaboration. A holistic and comprehensive approach to

addressing the complexities of food insecurity and its multidimensional aspects will continue to be crucial at HEIs now and in the future.

### **Theoretical Framework: Symbolic Interactionism**

Theories assist in explaining factors influencing the phenomenon of interest and relationships and conditions between the components involved (Nutbeam & Harris, 2004). I used SI as the theoretical framework offering perspective on how individuals' meaning developed, emerged, and was modified over time. SI stems from the work of George Mead and one of his students' Herbert Blumer, informing social psychology and sociology, respectively (Crotty, 1998). It is based on three main assumptions: individuals act toward something based on the meaning an experience has for the individual; the meaning of the experience is derived from interactions the individual has with others and things in their environment; and meanings are addressed in their world and modified through, an interpretive process, used by the individual in dealing with the experiences they encounter (Blumer, 2008). In this section, I will explain each assumption using an example of recreation to highlight how this meaning developed, emerged, and was modified over time.

The first assumption states individuals do not respond directly to things but attach meaning to them and act on the basis this meaning has for them. The world exists separately from the individual, yet is interpreted using symbols and language via the process of interactions within their environment (Blumer, 2008). For example, meaning placed on an activity determines for an individual if it is recreation or not, and becomes the basis of meaning during the given activity. An activity, such as running, may be

recreation for one individual and a chore for another. A long Sunday drive can be recreation for one, while driving to and from work may not be considered recreational or enjoyable, thus affecting the attitude and meaning in which the activity is conducted (Colton, 1987).

The second assumption states meaning emerges out of the ways in which individuals act towards and define things within their world (Blumer, 2008). Family can be the primary group with which an individual interacts and experiences forms of recreation, especially in the early stages of life. Through interactions with one's family and experiences the family members have with given activities, meanings are derived contributing to the development of favorable or unfavorable meanings for certain activities (Colton, 1987).

The third assumption states meanings are assigned and modified through an interpretive process, which is constantly being redefined. Through the interpretation of stimuli within their environment, individuals form new meanings and ways to respond, shaping meaning they give to their experiences (Blumer, 2008). Finally, meanings developed during previous experiences with certain activities influence behaviors and attitudes toward the given activity. For example, reasons for mountain climbing are different for experienced vs. inexperienced climbers (Colton, 1987).

SI distinguishes culture as a meaningful guide directing our lives, looking for culturally, historically, and socially situated interpretations. A central notion of SI is the putting one's self in place of the other (Crotty, 1998). This interaction with others, allows for understanding and gives context to the importance of the interaction. It is



within this dialogue and sharing of thoughts one can become aware of the "...perceptions, feelings and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and intent (Crotty, 1998, p.76-77). In using SI as a framework, I further defined how meaning is made and the circumstances which drive variations among participants' experiences and thus, meaning given to them.

### **My Story: Food Experiences**

Food is an expression of identity and is apparent in the experience of eating with others (Bisogni, Connors, Devine, & Sobal, 2002). Food is also an occasion for sharing, distributing, and giving of ourselves through items prepared. By examining what, where, how, and why of food choices and relationships with food, individuals develop a greater understanding of others and themselves. I shared my story with food experiences to provide background for the participants' in this research study.

I grew up in a two sibling and two parent household, with one working parent. I remember having food on the table, lunches packed with a sandwich, fruit, chips, and a cookie. Common dinners included tacos, burgers, mixed dishes, and breaded chicken. Food came from packages, cans, and fresh produce, and meats. Beverages included water, tea, milk, and an occasional soda. I felt nourished but did not have many ethnically diverse choices, besides being exposed to different authentic Italian and Polish dishes. My dad was of Italian and Irish decent and my mom Polish and German. There were not too many creative uses of grains, produce or proteins, but many common staples such as, rice, potatoes, broccoli, carrots, chicken, and ground beef. Food was considered fuel for sports, available when we were hungry and held a level of comfort. For example,

my grandmother's fruit salad, which now would be too way sweet for me, and my mom's stir-fry, breaded chicken, and dad's Barbecue sauce with *Busch* beer.

When I attended St. Louis University, I had a meal plan or additional meal points throughout my college career. I planned meals around classes, work, and other volunteer and professional commitments, choosing items on campus or preparing food items in a shared kitchen. I also could go to my Mom's whenever I needed a home cooked meal, since she lived 25 minutes away. I recall no experience with food insecurity or hunger on campus among students with whom I interacted and I do not recall seeing signage or information presented on these topics around campus. Thinking about my college experience in the absence of food insecurity has tweaked my interest surrounding this topic; my college experience did not have this additional concern influencing my ability to persist or approach my day-to-day responsibilities.

Food holds many different meanings now as a mom, dietitian, and educator. Food is associated with culture, nourishment, addictive and restrictive qualities, used to build and maintain muscle mass, used as a teaching tool, and to share with and comfort family and friends. I enjoy indulging in a St. Louis staple, *Ted Drewes* pumpkin pie concrete, but also balance most meals with whole grains, fresh produce, and proteins. I eat lean cuts of meat and seafood, but enjoy plant-based dishes as well. I love to cook for my family and others though also enjoy eating out and socializing with friends and family over shared tapas, Mexican, and wood-fired pizza, to name a few. When shopping for food I often look for deals and use coupons. I have access to a variety of grocery stores and farmer's markets. I do appreciate knowing where my food comes from and have

built relationships over the years with local farmers. I have choices when it comes to food and have never felt limited in food selection.

### **Study Overview**

This narrative inquiry explored experiences of students struggling with food insecurity. Research questions focused on meaning participants make of their lived experiences with food insecurity and use of a campus food pantry. Using a constructivist and interpretivist blended paradigm I allowed for rich understanding of a complex phenomenon occurring at HEIs. These related paradigms allowed for meaning to be shared and socially constructed between participants and myself, while providing interpretation of their experiences. SI was used as a framework in understanding how meaning evolves over time and changes based on interactions individuals have within their environment.

In Chapter II, I present literature considering a) the multidimensional aspects of food insecurity; b) the scope and relevance of food insecurity in the U.S. and HEIs; c) prevalence and demographics of food insecurity at HEIs; d) resources available to students; e) impacts for food insecure students; and f) an understanding of student's food experiences and choices. This literature review explores recent research on the topic of food insecurity and its impacts at HEIs. I further discuss SI, as the theoretical framework, and its use in literature. In this literature review, I provide context for the topic and it assisted me in developing initial questions to use as I collected data.

In Chapter III, I explain the research process and provide an overview of the constructivist and interpretivist blended paradigm, epistemology, ontology, and narrative

methodology. I provide preliminary findings from an exploratory study I conducted to gain knowledge on campus food pantries and stakeholder challenges and triumphs. Data collection methods utilized and justification for using these methods are outlined in detail as are the sampling strategies, data analysis, and criteria for rigor.

In Chapter IV, I introduce the stories of three participants who I collaborated with during this study. Highlights of aspects of their stories that provided context for their lived experience as a student using a campus food pantry are presented. Themes developed during data analysis include a) financial challenge identification; b) strategizing budget priorities; c) prioritizing health; d) food pantry uses and strategies; and e) having enough are introduced.

In Chapter V, I provide further interpretation of the experiences of participants using a campus food pantry. SI, as a theoretical framework, was used to provide perspective on meaning participants attached to their experiences with food insecurity and use of the campus food pantry; how this meaning developed, emerged, and was modified over time. Potential implications for stakeholders and considerations for future research and practice are discussed.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

To understand the complexity of food insecurity at HEIs, literature considering a) the multidimensional aspects of food insecurity; b) the scope and relevance of food insecurity in the U.S. and HEIs; c) prevalence and demographics of food insecurity at HEIs; d) resources available to students; e) impacts for food insecure students; and f) an understanding of student's food experiences and choices are reviewed. I will also further discuss SI, as the theoretical framework, and its use in literature. This literature review provides the reader with an understanding of current issues surrounding food insecurity and impacts at HEIs.

#### **Multidimensional Aspects of Food Insecurity**

Food insecurity is a phenomenon with multidimensional aspects (Bickel et al., 2000). These multidimensional features include, but are not limited to, having dependents, employment status, and the cultural, historical, and social context of students' situation, which include temporal components. Additional aspects include how students' access food, housing, transportation, or child care assistance (Cady, 2014). These multidimensional aspects have financial, physical, mental, and social implications, imposing added challenges to students experiencing food insecurity. Food insecurity can reduce students' physical, and mental health, diminishing a student's ability to learn, work, and care for themselves (Hughes et al., 2011). It can also influence academics, wellness, personal success, productivity, and student engagement (Bhattacharya et al.,

2004; Cady, 2014; Gaines et al., 2014). The fear or risk of not having enough to eat may also lead to overconsumption of energy-dense foods and at times an inadequate intake of key nutrients leading to poor quality diets (Devaney, Myoung, Carriquiry, & Camano-Garcia, 2005; Kempson, Keenan, Sadani, & Adler, 2003; Pan, Sherry, Njai, & Blanck, 2012; Widome, Neumark-Sztainer, Hannan, Haines, & Story, 2009). In this section, I provide further clarification on individual's basic needs and today's typical HEI student. This provides context for how aspects of these components include multidimensional features impacting a student's experience with food insecurity.

### **Basic Needs**

Food security is a physiological need. Basic physiological needs include access to food, water, sleep, oxygen, body temperature regulation, and movement (Maslow, 1943). For example, an individual lacking food, would desire to fulfill this need, seeking to satisfy hunger demands (Griffin, 1994). Once hunger is satisfied, this need no longer motivates (Griffin, 1994).

Student's food insecurity appears to affect individual's ability to eat balanced meals, not having enough food to last, and not having enough money to buy more. For example, suppressing and ignoring hunger, or letting go of paying bills to have money left over to help pay for food, were strategies utilized among students at the University of North Texas (Henry et al., 2014). Seven percent of students surveyed had run out of food in the past, cut meal sizes, or skipped meals (Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2016). Inadequate food access and intake can have the potential to influence one's ability to conduct

activities of daily living (Glanz, Basil, Maibach, Goldberb, & Synder, 1998). If this need is not satisfied, the drive to satisfy will dominate affecting other areas of one's life.

### **Today's Typical Higher Education Institution Student**

Today's typical student is not always considered a full-time traditional student who recently graduated from high school. Seventy-four percent of college students are non-traditional, meaning they fit one of the below criteria (USDA: NCES, 2015). They attend college part-time, over the age of 24, are employed fulltime (often over 35 hours a week), are financially independent, must provide for dependents, are a single parent, or do not have a high school diploma. Nearly 23.8 percent of students are highly nontraditional, they fit four or more of the criteria, and 31.3 are moderately nontraditional, they fit two or three of the criteria (USDA: NCES, 2015).

Since 1995, data have been collected on non-traditional students by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Many of the above features have increased among undergraduate students in the past 20 years (USDA: NCES, 2015). These include students with four or more of the above criteria, independent status, having dependents, single with dependents, GED or other equivalency, and delayed postsecondary enrollment of more than one year. More students are attending full-time and less working full-time (USDA: NCES, 2015). Many of these features provide additional financial strains and imply an older degree-seeking student. More individuals attending HEIs are reporting food insecurity and the additional impacts this has on other areas of their life.

### **Relevance of Food Insecurity in the United States and at Higher Education Institutions**

In this section, the scope of food insecurity in the U.S. and its connections to HEIs is reviewed. I provide resources, adding context for the current national data surrounding food insecurity and setting the stage for why this is a timely issue to be addressing at HEIs. Food insecurity, defined in chapter I, as limited access to acquiring adequate food due to insufficient resources, is prevalent across the nation (USDA: ERS, 2016). Two resources provide context for the degree of food insecurity in the U.S. In 2015, the USDA's food security statistics indicated 12.7 percent of U.S. households were food insecure at some time during the year (USDA: ERS, 2016). This survey also highlighted households' access to food throughout the year, access to balanced meals, and times a household may have been hungry or lost weight because there was not enough money for food. These questions tap into the intrapersonal and interpersonal components related to food insecurity, such as knowledge regarding resource access and household's extended support network.

Feeding America is a nationwide network of 200-member food banks serving the U.S. and providing food assistance to an estimated 46.5 million Americans each year (Weinfield et al., 2014). Within this network, Hunger in America was developed as a series of quadrennial studies providing comprehensive demographic profiles of individuals seeking food assistance through partner agencies. Using the USDA's six-item Core Food Security Module, featuring questions on food access and hunger, Hunger in America 2014 revealed 84 percent of Feeding America's networks are food insecure, of which ten percent are college students (Weinfield et al., 2014).



### **Prevalence of Food Insecurity at Higher Education Institutions**

In the last eight years, several studies have focused on food insecurity among college students, and generally have found prevalence on HEI campuses to be significant. In this section, similarities and differences among these studies are highlighted, as well as connections to the multidimensional aspects of food insecurity. In doing so, the research agenda is informed and potential gaps addressed, allowing the depth of this phenomenon to be featured.

These studies report many similarities between demographics surveyed. Most studies looked at gender, race, use of campus food pantries by students, students living on or off-campus, students using a campus meal plan, employment status, and parenting status. Sample size ranged from 53 to 1,882 students. The institutions included rural and urban HEIs across eight different states: three in the northeastern part of the U.S., one Southern state, three Western states, and one Midwest state. HEIs ranged from research to teaching institutions, and community colleges.

Food insecurity prevalence has been found in 10 studies reviewed. Eight of the 10 studies were conducted in the U.S. and for purposes of this literature review are the focus for this section. Prevalence ranged from 14% to 59% at HEI across the U.S. Rates of food insecurity in HEIs are higher compared to state and even U.S. totals. In Hawaii, New York, Ohio, Maryland, California, Illinois, and Oregon the food insecurity rate on campus was estimated to be higher (21 percent, 39%, 19% , 42%, 56%, 35%, and 59%, respectively) than the prevalence of food insecurity in the given states' household (8% 13.3%, 16.9%, 12.6%, 12.5%, 12.9%, and 16%, respectively) (Chapparo et al., 2009;

Freudenberg et al., 2011; Koller, 2014; Martinez et al., 2016; Maroto et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2016; Patton-Lopez et al., 2014).

These studies offer initial awareness of the importance for HEIs to assess their students' needs for support services, providing basic needs, such as food and housing. If there are reports of more food insecure individuals among the HEI population in some states this is a prime time to equip students with how to access appropriate resources to best prepare them during and ultimately after degree completion. Students experiencing food insecurity can gain additional support, confidence, and motivation during their HEI experience if they know resources are available to them, helping their chances of success. Educational attainment is associated with upward social mobility and shapes future opportunities for adults as they establish their careers (Patton-Lopez et al., 2014). Identifying and utilizing appropriate resources in college, could initiate future life course decision-making for students impacting their career, family, and themselves (Gaines et al., 2014).

### **Demographic Features**

Prevalence studies provide understanding around demographics common to students experiencing food insecurity. In this section, aspects of gender, race, culture, living arrangements, parenting status, employment status, and traumatic life events, all of which influence students experience with food insecurity are highlighted. These demographic features illustrate the multidimensional nature of food insecurity, which has implications for students' experiencing this phenomenon. These all occur to varying

degrees, but are important to consider when working with and providing resources for students.

**Gender, race, and culture.** The prevalence studies focused on providing a representative sample of participants at each institution, but depending on sampling strategy utilized and respondents who chose to participate, this was not always the case. Females commonly reported more incidences of food insecure than males in seven of the studies reviewed (Freudenberg et al., 2011; Gaines et al., 2014; Koller, 2014; Martinez et al., 2016; Morris et al., 2016; Patton-Lopez et al., 2014), while in two studies (Chaparro et al., 2009; Maroto et al., 2015) males were overrepresented.

Races varied among studies, including, Asian, African Americans, Hawaiian, Hispanic, Japanese, Whites, Pacific Islanders, yet in each study a different race was more prevalent. For example, Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders was a significant predictor of food insecurity in the study conducted at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. This makes sense for the given study due to the geographical location and a larger percentage of this race being enrolled at this in-state school (Chaparro et al., 2009). African American were oversampled and White, Asian, and Hispanic students were under sampled based on the given institution's overall demographics in one study, while another study underrepresented African American students and their level of food insecurity (Maroto et al., 2015; Morris et al., 2016). Nationally, African Americans tend to be at a higher risk of food insecurity (Coleman-Jensen, Rabbitt, Gregory, & Singh, 2016), due to more single parent homes and lower income status.

It is crucial to address gender, race, and culture, and its impact on food insecurity. Based on the given prevalence studies, it appears individuals reporting food insecurity are from a variety of different backgrounds. This adds to the complexity of the issue, thus stakeholders implementing resources on HEI campuses need to be aware of how students' background and cultural expectations influence their experience with food insecurity. Resources on campuses need to offer varying degrees of assistance considering individual student needs, their use of these resources, and potential to assess appropriate resources (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015).

**Financial impacts.** Many features of the prevalence studies, which impact students' experiences with food insecurity, directly influence their financial situation. These characteristics also align with some of the features of non-traditional students, including: having dependents, being a single parent, and being financially independent. Students' financial situation is impacted by their living arrangements, employment status, and parenting status. Important considerations of these features are highlighted, including ones which stakeholders at HEIs may need to reflect on when implementing resources on their given campuses.

*Living arrangements.* Where students live and with whom can influence their food insecurity status. Students can live on-campus, off-campus by themselves or with friends, parents or guardians. Living on-campus usually requires a campus meal plan. This can add costs to student's financial circumstances, yet also provides consistent access to food. For those studies documenting living on or off-campus and meal plan status, 40-70 percent of students lived off-campus (Chaparro et al., 2009, Patton-Lopez et

al., 2014), and 26-28 percent had an on-campus meal plan (Chaparro et al., 2009; Martinez et al., 2016; Patton-Lopez et al., 2014). At these institutions, students living off-campus did not require a meal plan. These data illustrate many students chose to live off-campus and not have a campus meal plan to cut down on costs, anticipating off-campus housing and food is less expensive. Family and peer networks may assist with the financial burden of the cost of living, ultimately affecting monies for other expenses, including food.

*Employment status.* Many students seek employment to help with the cost of their education and basic needs. Whether students are employed or not and hours worked per week, can influence the amount of money available for additional expenses. An association was found among students who identified as financially independent and their risk of food insecurity (Gaines et al., 2014). Students who are financially independent tend to seek consistent employment, though are still more likely to be food insecure. This suggests their expenses are greater than what they require for basic needs (Gaines et al., 2014). Students working were twice as likely to report experiences of food insecurity, with these students averaging 18 hours of work a week. This was even more pronounced for students employed 20 hours a week or more with 44 to 50 percent of these students being food insecure (Freudenburg et al., 2011; Patton-Lopez et al., 2014). At UNT, students reviewed their paycheck priorities showing most students paid rent and bills first, with money left over used for food last (Henry et al., 2014). This is important for stakeholders to consider, because students may need financial counseling assistance to assist in managing their increased economic burdens.

*Parenting status.* Students who have dependents have additional financial concerns impacting housing, food, transportation, child care and insurance options. At two community colleges living situation was again a component of food insecurity status, with parental status an additional concern (Maroto et al., 2015). Seventy-seven percent of the 301 undergraduate students surveyed were single parents and significantly more likely to be food insecure (Maroto et al., 2015). Additional dependents add increased financial burdens to students enrolled at HEIs. These additional financial challenges could impact how students address their food insecurity experience and how comfortable they are asking for help from their immediate support networks and within the larger community setting (Resnikoff, 2014).

**Traumatic life events.** Events which alter individuals' daily life can have financial, physical, social, and mental implications. Often these events can change an individual's access to resources for basic needs access including, food and housing. Gaines et al. (2014) conducted their research within 12 months of a devastating tornado in the community and surrounding area. This traumatic event impacted students' financial and housing situation and was associated with an increased risk of food insecurity (Gaines et al., 2014), secondary to how students coped with this trauma and the emergency resources or support available to them after the event. At UNT, students reported their experience with food insecurity began after a traumatic event, such as a medical emergency, legal trouble, or a divorce (Henry et al., 2014). It is important to consider past and present events, impacting students and how these affect their current lived experience with food insecurity.

**Resource utilization.** The above associations with food insecurity require students to consider alternative resources. These resources can be on or off-campus and provide financial, housing, and food assistance. Koller (2014) highlighted reasons for food insecurity and community resource awareness and usage. Lack of employment, poor money management skills, and family's income status were all reasons cited (Koller, 2014). However, these reasons did not always warrant students use of resources provided. Students reasoning for not using community resources included they were embarrassed, believed they were ineligible, unsure of location, and not allowed by parent (Koller, 2014). These reasons begin to impact individuals' attitudes and perceptions surrounding food insecurity status and reliance on family for assistance and support.

Many students did not participate in campus food assistance programs, possibly due to not being eligible for certain programs or not knowing where to access resources on campus (Chapparo et al., 2009). Negative stigma by both students and family, and lack of knowledge can impact how students utilize resources in their community or at their institution. Four of the prevalence studies reported use of food assistance, revealing 6-35 percent of students used SNAP, food pantries, or other food assistance programming offered by their HEI (Chapparo et al., 2009; Freudenberg et al., 2011; Gaines et al., 2014; Patton-Lopez et al., 2014). These numbers appear low and assessing how to best meet students' needs and concerns via on and off-campus support services could help in providing appropriate assistance and an overall increase in usage for those enrolled in HEIs.

### **Critique of Prevalence Studies**

The previous eight studies referenced were cross-sectional and six utilized the Adult Food Security Survey Module (AFSSM) as one measure for data collection (Chapparo et al., 2009; Gaines et al., 2014; Maroto et al., 2015; Martinez et al., 2016; Morris et al., 2016; Patton-Lopez et al., 2014). This module is part of the larger U.S. Household Food Security Module, measuring a variety of conditions, which can serve as indicators for identifying levels of food security (Bickel et al., 2000). Indicators include if respondents can afford balanced meals; must cut the size of meals because of too little money for food; have lost weight due to not eating enough; have been hungry; have not eaten for a whole day; could not afford more food; or ate less than one feels they need. The strength of the measure is the various questions are meant to capture the prevalence of food insecurity.

The two remaining studies used an additional version of a self-report survey focusing on food insecurity status and its various components (Freudenberg et al., 2011; Koller et al., 2014). Surveys rely on individuals' self-reports of their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Information obtained via surveys relies on the honesty of the participant and at times, there is no opportunity for probing further, leaving the researcher with unanswered questions (Lodico et al., 2010).

Cross-sectional studies compare different population groups at a single point in time. This is often a snapshot, allowing researchers to assess many different variables at one time. However, these studies do not offer insight into what happened before or after that point (Creswell, 2003). The cross-sectional design and data collection method



utilized are two limitations noted in the prevalence studies and should be considerations for future research.

Participants were obtained by administering surveys in specific classes or departments at the given HEI, while others were sent via a university or college system email. For all nine studies, possible sample bias was noted as a limitation. When any survey is distributed, there is going to be those whom tend to respond, and those whom do not respond, regardless of how often the survey is sent. This response bias, could over or under-estimate the true prevalence of students experiencing food insecurity. For example, students who are interested in this topic or feel results or findings may impact them could respond more often, overestimating food insecurity prevalence on the given campus. On the other hand, there is a stigma attached to food insecurity and asking for help (Resnikoff, 2014), thus those who may have food insecurity may not respond, underestimating food insecurity prevalence.

Six of the eight studies reviewed had more female respondents. These surveys reflect aspects of health, wellness, and eating behavior. Females are more likely to respond to surveys, which may contribute to understanding their health (Korkeila et al., 2001; Volken, 2013). This may be one reason for the increase in females reporting food insecurity. Though understanding differences between genders and how to best meet each of their needs is important for stakeholders to consider.

Though it is difficult to fully capture today's typical HEI student in the prevalence studies, many of these features were reported, however, no study surveyed for all seven criteria. Students with food insecure characteristics tend to be vulnerable impacting

persistence and time to degree completion. These students have additional challenges, which can affect their well-being and levels of stress (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). Understanding how these criteria impact food insecure students may affect resources or support services for this vulnerable population group.

### **Section Summary**

The three data collection methods used in this study address understanding surrounding these above non-traditional criteria, student's basic needs, and many of the multidimensional features discussed in this section. This phenomenon is complex and in sorting through aspects of individual's stories, clarification on how to best meet students' needs is sought. These multidimensional features impact meaning students give to their experiences with food insecurity and campus food pantry use.

### **Resources Available to Students**

Many HEIs mission statements include references to support student success. The documentation of food insecurity is increasing at HEIs, and one way they are responding to students reporting food insecurity is by offering campus food pantries. Support services also provide information on other local food assistance programs, as well as additional resource management services, such as financial, housing, transportation, childcare, and insurance options (Fredenburg et al., 2011). These resources increase students' opportunities for access to food and basic physiological needs, and support student well-being. The following section reviews resources offered by HEIs, including SNAP registration assistance, campus food pantries, Single Stop, and other on-campus food assistance programs.

### **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)**

SNAP assistance and outreach can be a resource students utilize. If a student is enrolled in a HEI full-time they may be eligible for SNAP if they get public assistance benefits under a Title IV-A program of social security; take part in a state or federally funded work study program; work at least 20 hours a week; take care of a dependent household member under the age of 6; or a single parent enrolled full time in a HEI taking care of a dependent household member under the age of 12 (USDA: FNS, 2016a). However, there are noted barriers to students who may be eligible for this service. At times, language discrepancies impede students from using this resource, especially for those with English as a second language (Algert, Reibel, & Renvall, 2006). As well, the application process factors into a students' decision to use these resources (Bhattarai, Duffy, & Raymond, 2005), since it is lengthy and often requires assistance with completing, due to the nature of the financial questions. In addition, negative stigma is attached to using these and other services which impede students' use.

### **Campus Food Pantries**

Campus food pantries have formed due to the evolving student demographic, tuition costs, transportation concerns, meal plan costs, and limited eligibility of SNAP for some students (Bartkowiak, 2015). The number of food pantries on HEIs' campuses increased from one in 2007 to 475 in March 2017 (College and University Food Bank Alliance (CUFBA), 2017). Often a campus food pantry will become a member organization of a local or regional food bank as in the case of Pulaski Technical College, University of Central Arkansas, and University of Arkansas (CUFBA, 2016). This

allows campus food pantries access to low-cost foods, grant opportunities, and training for campus staff. Varying by HEI, a student government association, club, or an administrative department manages the campus food pantry (Student Government Resource Center, 2016). Students receive a variety of items from these pantries once or twice a week, supplementing student's food needs.

### **Single Stop**

A service offered at community colleges is Single Stop, a program linking eligible students to government programs like SNAP and Women Infant and Children Outreach (Fredenburg et al., 2011). In 2007, Single Stop was established as a national organization and began launching sites across the country in over eight states. The Single Stop model is a “one-stop” approach which includes services such as tax preparation, benefits enrollment, financial services, and legal services. It provides students who work multiple jobs and juggle other personal responsibilities an opportunity to access these services under one roof (Goldrick-Rab, Broton, & Frank, 2014).

### **Other Campus Food Assistance Programming**

Many programs have provided additional resources to meet students' needs beside the campus food pantry. Within the California State University system, students have access to *Hungry Student Kits* which are bags of ready to eat, microwaveable foods and snacks to support hunger on campus. This provides an opportunity for students to have one meal, addressing the reality students have varying levels of needs and some may just require a meal to get through the day. These kits are placed at various locations throughout campus (Crutchfield et al, 2016). Another option, discussed with a

stakeholder working with a campus snack pack program, allows students to receive snacks throughout the day. This program is run by a social worker who works directly with students for many different support service needs, in particular homelessness and hunger (R.Kimberlin, personal communication, May 17, 2016). Finally, within the University of California (UC) system, part of the campus food pantry is offering additional education to students such as, cooking classes, and navigating a limited budget. This is an arm of the campus food pantry and includes providing dedicated spaces for students to store and prepare food in between class times (Martinez et al., 2016).

### **Stigma Surrounding Food Insecurity**

Students' decision to use the above services can be impacted by stigma surrounding the use of these resources, as well as normalcy surrounding lack of food and finances in college. Food insecurity is often a normal part of the college experience; the struggling college student eating ramen is perceived as part of this experience. At UNT, several participants stated this perception of normalcy as a primary reason why they did not ask their parents for assistance with additional financial help or food (Henry et al., 2014). The experiences of hungry students becoming normalized is an expectation, minimizing the problem of students struggling to eat balanced meals daily (Crutchfield et al., 2016). Students believe others are worse off than them and they should be able to provide for themselves. This indicates a sense of independence and new expectations which are considered part of the college experience (Henry et al., 2014).

Stigmatization can prevent students from receiving the assistance they need (Loftin, 2013), and is defined as a discrediting attribute, which reduces an individual to a "tainted, discounted" person (Goffman, 1963, p.3). The negativity surrounding seeking help can be exacerbated by apprehension, anxiety, and discrimination. At University of Central Florida (UCF) students were surveyed about stigma and barriers to using a campus food pantry. Ninety percent have never been to a pantry before using the one provided on campus and almost 25 percent reported it was a difficult decision to decide to use the resources provided (Loftin, 2013). Several students stated feelings of shame, embarrassment, and pride prevented them from receiving help.

At UNT, 27 students were interviewed and feelings of blame and shame surrounding food insecurity were discussed (Henry et al., 2014). Denial of their situation prevents students from accessing food from the resources provided or known to them. As well, social anxiety issues were noted when not having enough food to eat (Henry et al., 2014). This can also be due to a feeling of shame, due to not wanting to ask for help from support networks; for many this can be connected to the perception of an inability to provide for themselves (Carapezza, 2015). Thus, stigma surrounds most types of food assistance and not knowing where to find support for adequate resources can keep students from seeking these services (Resnikoff, 2014). The aim of the above programs is to de-stigmatize food assistance providing a comprehensive approach to student support services.

## **Section Summary**

It is important to understand an individual's overall experience with food insecurity, not just a snapshot. As more research is presented on this issue and its multidimensional aspects, it is important to hear from students themselves. By understanding the complexities of individual students experiencing food insecurity, stakeholders can best provide adequate and timely resources both on and off-campus, gain understanding if resources are meeting student's needs and, if not, identify gaps in HEIs' food assistance programs. In the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on the impacts of some of these multidimensional aspects and the importance of understanding individual's food experiences.

### **Impacts of Food Insecurity**

Food insecurity is more than a distraction (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015); it alters the HEI experience and makes an already difficult transitional time near impossible for students, who otherwise are motivated to change their life course. Though prevalence studies provide insight into some general coping strategies via a cross-sectional survey, it is helpful to expand beyond these to see the depth of food insecurity and its potential reach. In addition to the cost and financial considerations students face when choosing to pursue a degree, the day-to-day struggles ultimately impact student's HEI experience and persistence (Cady, 2014). In this section, I explore financial impacts on academics, and mental health, and its social and physical implications.

## **Financial Impacts**

A college education is an investment in human capital increasing individual's income and allowing opportunity for more responsible financial behaviors (Robb et al., 2012). The monetary cost impedes the path leading to enhanced opportunity costs of a college education for students who are food insecure. Affordability is one barrier to degree completion.

Income status influences time to graduation, with low-income students having lower college completion rates than higher income counterparts (Johnson & Collins, 2009). Students from high-income families are six times more likely to persist than from low-income families (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Students enter HEIs with varying levels of economic stability and these are based on past and present financial decisions. This suggests students, who are already in a financial bind, have an additional barrier impeding persistence. Gaining understanding surrounding the decision to continue a degree program if they do not persist would be helpful. This may allow understanding and provide context for financial impacts and struggles students encounter on their journey to persistence.

The benefit of financial management, including reasonable debt levels (Johnson & Collins, 2009), can help bridge the gap to degree completion. In doing so, students must manage budgets for the first time or differently than they did in the past. Students find creative ways to cut down on costs. Students choose to live off-campus, renting an apartment or living with other students or a family; cutting costs associated with rent. As well, students choose not to buy a meal plan averaging \$4.50-7.50 a meal, which can



range from \$2,310 - \$3,050 a semester depending on if a student lives on-campus or off-campus (University of Northern Colorado, 2017.) This does not consider transportation, child-care, books, or other technological devices required of students (Nellum, 2015).

### **Impacts on Academic Success**

Students working have additional stresses that can impact their college experience. Though working, at times, is a necessity and an opportunity to gain skills for career development, the number of hours' students work impacts time spent on academics. As seen in prevalence studies, students often were employed over 20 hours a week. Students with lower incomes are more likely to work to cover the costs of college (Cady, 2014). Over 40 percent of full-time students work for pay during the academic year and 26 percent work more than 20 hours per week (USDE: NCES, 2016). Seventy-six percent of part-time students work for pay during the academic year and 64 percent work more than 20 hours per week (USDE: NCES, 2016).

Students supporting themselves financially are 1.6 times more likely to report food insecurity and students working more than 20 hours per week have a higher rate of food insecurity than those who do not work (Freudenberg et al., 2011). This could be due to several factors, including supporting additional dependents and accumulating financial responsibilities, which can affect access to food. Students working 10-15 hours a week can see positive impacts on grades and general engagement in school, work, and on campus (King, 2006). Once students work more than 20 hours a week, GPA can be impacted. One of the prevalence studies conducted at a community college revealed students at risk for food insecurity reported a GPA of 2.0-2.49. This was significant

when compared to students not food insecure who reported a higher GPA, between 3.5-4.0 (Maroto et al., 2015). This study found association between food insecurity and poorer academic performance (Maroto et al, 2015); however, more work needs to be completed in this area.

A similar connection was found showing a negative correlation between food insecurity and GPA at the University of Arkansas. The 2.1 - 3.0 GPA group were the most food insecure compared to those with higher GPAs (MacDonald, 2016). Finally, a study at the UNT, captured students were failing secondary to hunger and an inability to concentrate. This contributed to lack of energy to study and complete work, ultimately affecting grades, even if students' motivation to attend was high (Henry et al., 2014). Eliciting support from academic advisors on how to best counsel and support students whose grades are suffering due to lack of food and basic needs can allow for development of a plan of action for their success.

### **Mental Health Impact**

Financial impacts and academic success can be connected to overall mental health and well-being. Mental health is a significant issue among HEI students, whether food insecure or not. Mental health issues are a leading impediment to academic success. In a report released by the American College Health Association (ACHA), students cited depression and anxiety among the top hurdles to academic performance (ACHA, 2014). Sixty-four percent of these young adults were no longer in college or were not attending because of a mental health related reason (ACHA, 2014).

Students with greater financial strains and who worked more hours per week had poorer mental health (Roberts, Golding, Towell, & Weinreb, 1999). Three hundred university students completed a survey on general health assessing their physical and psychological well-being. Their findings revealed a link between adverse mental and physical health to the experience of financial difficulties. Students who reported they grew up in lower-income families were more likely to screen for depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts (Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, & Hefner, 2007).

A survey with college students using similar screening tools as the Healthy Minds Study, a national survey of college students' mental health, was designed to capture information regarding food insecurity and mental health (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015). Students experiencing food insecurity internalize the added stress of financial concerns and procuring foods. This can impair student's abilities to know where to access supportive resources, thus leading to a decreased use of coping mechanisms or their social support network (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015). This study, included 4,312 students and 55 respondents who indicated food insecurity also reported symptoms of clinical depression, 52 percent severe levels of anxiety, 16 percent symptoms of an eating disorder, and 20 percent serious thoughts of suicide (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015). Mental health is multi-layered impacting physical and psychological well-being. Struggles with food insecurity impact mental health status (Goldrick et al., 2015) and can compromise students' experience at the HEI where they are enrolled.

### **Social and Physical Implications**

Additionally, there is a social component to food insecurity, which ties into past and present experiences. Students who reported they grew up poor, more commonly

experienced hunger in college (Mai, 2014). One study supporting this concept showed current and childhood food insecurity were related, but most students in this study were new to food insecurity (Martinez et al., 2016). Of the 39 percent of students identified as food insecure, 57 percent did not report experiencing food insecurity as a child (Martinez et al., 2016). Within these experiences, understanding how students procure food and how they define coping strategies to access food is crucial. In reviewing social impacts studies including children and adults were examined to broaden beyond HEI, illustrating the temporal impact food insecurity can have on individuals' life experiences.

**Coping strategies.** When reviewing literature on children and adults, one study reviewed qualitative and quantitative longitudinal data from an USDA survey, examining persistent food insecurity among low-income rural families (Mammen, Bauer, & Richards, 2009). These families lived in seven different states and data collected focused on personal circumstances or place and its impact on the families' state of food insecurity (Mammen et al., 2009). Families seemed to use strategies that fit into their lifestyle and adjusted as their personal circumstances changed (Mammen et al., 2009). Most families adopted and used decision-making skills to stretch their dollar, impacting shopping techniques, relied on external community sources, such as food banks, and engaged in consumption reduction behaviors conveying a sense of desperation (Mammen et al., 2009). Though this study was conducted with rural families, it highlights the importance of both place and context. It is not one thing or circumstance at a given time and place which cause food insecurity, yet a variety of issues, which invade and settle into an individual's life.

Children's experiences with food insecurity, indicate the quantity and quality of the foods they eat in their diet, has a social component (Connell, Lofton, Yadrick, & Rehner, 2005). Adolescents, aged 11-16, were interviewed using a semi-structured questioning method. Eating less both in quantity and frequency and eating faster or more when food was available were cited as aspects of their experience with food insecurity. At times, children had to eat foods they did not like (Connell et al., 2005), which was described as a feeling of having no choice. Social components included children's use of informal social networks for food acquisition, including sharing, borrowing food or money to buy food, and eating with other families.

Student's coping strategies overlap with some of the above solutions. Students procure food from friends or support networks, strategically position themselves closer to food, whether at work establishments, via free food on campus, or access food assistance programs (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015). However, students may be unwilling to use these resources due to stigma surrounding this issue (Resnikoff, 2014). This may be due to students not knowing how to access support services or even the support services in place at the given institution. Sometimes without this support, students' financial strains are too great.

Goldrick-Rab et al. (2015) found 20 percent of students who were food insecure used SNAP, the most common coping strategy next to Medicaid (27 percent). Other coping strategies included receiving free foods or meals and borrowing money to pay bills (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015). There are many support services available to students including SNAP, Women Infant and Children Outreach, social security disability

insurance, childcare assistance housing, transportation assistance, veteran benefits, and unemployment compensation. These may not be services which HEIs offer, but student affairs or a student life office can support students in need, assisting them if they are eligible and where to go to receive these resources. However, if students do not seek help at their institution, they may not know these services exist.

**Impact on diet quality.** Student's food insecurity appears to affect individual's ability to eat nutritionally balanced meals, not having enough food to last and not having enough money to buy more, makes this a vulnerable group. Vulnerability implies these groups may be unable to cope with threats to their basic food access (Riely, Mock, Cogill, Bailey, & Kenefick, 1999), or know how to access appropriate resources. With increased vulnerability, comes decreased confidence in many areas of one's life, influencing academic and personal success, student engagement, and well-being (Cady, 2014; Beegle, 2003).

Wisconsin HOPE Lab surveyed 1,007 low-and moderate-income students at ten Wisconsin colleges and universities. Sixteen percent reported not eating a balanced diet, while seven percent had run out of food, cut meal sizes or skipped meals (Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2016). Eleven percent reported not eating for a full day and six percent utilized food stamps (Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2016). These data began to focus on the day-to-day struggle with procuring food and the impact of this struggle on individual's diet and food behaviors. Since this study used a survey it is difficult to capture what student' perceptions of balanced diet may be or the resources available to them. It is difficult to understand what cutting meal sizes or skipping meals may feel or look like for

these students. The current study explores how these hurdles impact students' day-to-day life and how they may overcome these challenges.

The inability to afford food can change dietary behaviors, food decisions, and diet quality. These additional stresses have led to students seeking and consuming nutritionally deficient, energy-dense foods. At University of North Texas, most students stated they often purchased food in bulk because it was cheaper. However, students had concerns about the quality of this food. Students wanted to purchase healthier foods, such as whole, natural fruits, and vegetables, but financial strains or proper refrigeration were barriers to obtaining these foods (Henry et al., 2014).

Individuals experiencing food insecurity are more likely to consume nutritionally inadequate foods due to limited resources compared to those identifying as food secure (Mello et al., 2010). Though most individuals know health matters, it is crucial to consider what eating healthy or adequate nutritional quality means to those who use food pantries. In a study of 796 low-income individuals surveyed in four different community programs in Minnesota, individuals were asked how they would define healthy food. Common definitions included, fruit and vegetables, meats, grains, low fat or lean, and "good for you" (Eikenberry & Smith, 2004). The range of responses included specific categories of foods, their nutritional value, and specific food qualities which are perceived as healthy to consumers.

Among 92 low-income women, nutrition knowledge varied from familiarity with food categories to various health claims leading to further confusion (Wigg-Damman & Smith, 2009). Findings from a group of university students showed a lack of nutrition

knowledge and reliance on fast food due to limited income (Garcia, Sykes, Matthews, Martin, & Leipert, 2010). In another study, 90 food pantry users expressed which health topics were of greatest interest to them. Responses ranged from learning more about shopping and stretching food dollars to cooking low-cost tasty meals, money management, and general healthful food choices (Hoisington, Armstrong-Shultz, & Butkus, 2002).

Though it is important for HEIs to have support services in place addressing the prevalence of food insecurity, it is just as crucial to offer foods with adequate nutritional quality and the necessary educational resources to ensure its consumption. As well, gaining understanding of how students use those foods in their overall diet is important because diet quality is a component of food security (Alaimo, 2013).

It is useful to learn what skills and day-to-day practices are most helpful given an individual's cultural, historical and social context, when investigating what can assist individuals in engaging in healthy lifestyle practices. This proposed research agenda contributes to understanding how students use foods received from campus food pantries in their total diet. As well, understanding how participants' meaning impacts food choices considered.

### **Understanding Food Experiences and Food Choices**

The effects of an individual's food insecurity experience will vary, yet are impactful. Though participants in the current research study are adults, they too have had past experiences, which are considered in their current experiences. In understanding past, present, and future intentions, these individual's stories can be retold. I believe



students' narratives are important to hear and can shed light onto their experiences. There is very little published research in this area.

### **Temporality and Food Experiences**

In this last section, the temporal nature of food experiences and choices is highlighted. The food decisions made by individuals reveal views, passions, background knowledge, assumptions, and personalities. Food choices tell stories of families, assimilation, as well as group identity (Bisogni et al., 2002). Often, they are based on emotion rather than rational thoughts, occurring when an individual is stressed or hungry (Just, Mancino, & Wansink, 2007). In reviewing individuals' experiences, I move beyond HEI students and examine studies including children and adults, to illustrate the temporal nature of food insecurity.

### **Temporality and Food Choices**

Food deprivation in childhood can be associated with socioeconomic status and obesity in adult years. Thirty low-income rural women with children were followed for three years collecting quantitative and qualitative data (Olson, Bove & Miller, 2007). The goal was to gain understanding of how food deprivation in childhood influences attitudes toward the use of food later in life. Sixty percent of the participants were food insecure and those reporting disordered eating patterns (72.2 percent) were overweight or obese (Olson et al., 2007). Participants spoke of their experience with food deprivation during childhood and adolescence occurring within the context of their parents' income, gaps in employment, marriage troubles, or alcoholism. Some of the long-term dietary consequences were formative experiences for these women. These allowed food

management skills and coping strategies for dealing with limited resources to be a way of life. However, some women developed negative food relationships with certain foods, which were offered during financially difficult times (Olson et al., 2007). These food experiences influenced their current food choices. As well, participants spoke of how food binges during times of increased food in the house were reflected in current eating practices.

This study provides insight into how past experiences influence current, whether food-related, social, or personal. Though this study looks at rural women only, and is all self-report, there was clarity in the recall women provided. There were specific details allowing the reader to gain insight into their experience. In understanding other's stories, stakeholders can prioritize and streamline programming to meet student's needs. In understanding past experiences, insight is gained into present and potentially future strategies for students' experiencing food insecurity at HEIs.

In another study, 11 Cambodian refugee women were interviewed about their past food experiences and the relationship to their current food beliefs and eating practices (Peterman et al., 2010). Though their experience is different due to the cultural, historical, and social context, they experienced food deprivation. Not having access or quality food daily does not satisfy hunger needs. These participants had been deprived of food for an extended period, which had an impact on how they approached food upon arriving in the U.S. There seemed to be an abundance of food so they were not worried they would go hungry (Peterman et al., 2010). However, their experience with sporadic

access to resources previously, led to overconsumption currently. These past experiences impacted their current adult food behaviors.

Though sample size was small and conducted in a focus group format with only women at one point in time, findings continue to support past experiences influencing current experiences. In gaining insight into the whole story, not just part of the story, stakeholders can provide a more comprehensive and holistic approach to supporting individuals experiencing food insecurity and using the campus food pantry. It is important to gain access to this information and though each experience with food insecurity may vary between individuals, it is crucial for students to have space to tell their story.

### **Theoretical Framework in the Literature**

In Chapter I, SI was introduced as the theoretical framework selected for the study. SI is based on three assumptions: individuals act toward something based on the meaning an experience has for them; this meaning is derived from interactions one has within their environments; and meanings are modified and evolve over time as the individual deals with experiences they encounter (Blumer, 2008). As well, SI focuses on putting oneself in the place of the other to best understand their point of view, while considering the cultural, historical, and social context of their experiences and interpretations. In this section, literature regarding SI as a theoretical framework is reviewed.

## **Symbolic Interactionism in the Literature**

Our world is shaped by stories and the meanings these have for individuals will vary. By listening to stories to capture the intended meaning, individual considerations surrounding the phenomena can more clearly be understood. Three examples from literature are presented which have used SI.

Teacher identity was explored through narratives on making meaning of their professional lives, looking specifically at their personal, social, and situational identity (Smit & Fritz, 2008). The focus was on meaning, language, and thought individuals gave to their identity as a teacher. Individuals act toward people and things in their environment based on meanings they attribute to them. Both body and vocal language, give individuals opportunity to discuss meaning, and thought allows for interpretation of this meaning. The personal, social, situational, and temporality of the teacher's professional lives was interpreted and how these interact to capture teacher identity was explored (Smit & Fritz, 2008).

Experiences of 29 homeless individuals using in-depth interviews with single adult shelter users also used SI (Boydell, Goering, & Morrell-Bellai, 2000). The research focus was on the lived experience of these individuals and how through interactions with others, humans understand social norms and roles. By studying these individuals, insight was provided into identity construction and self-concept (Boydell et al., 2000). The meanings which individuals attribute to people and objects have bearing on how individuals act towards them. In focusing on personal, social, situational, and temporality, especially the past, present, and future self, it was found homelessness poses

a threat to identity and perceptions of self. Meaningful work, relationships, and a place to call one's own are lost (Boydell et al., 2000).

Finally, recovery narratives in mental health used SI to suggest recovery is defined through interpretations which individuals make for themselves and one another. Meaning varies, depending on who is acting and interpreting, (ie., providers, consumers, family members and policy makers) (Jacobson, 2001). The uniqueness of the recovery process was explored as clients' conceptualization of their problems was understood. In listening to participant's stories and hearing what they were saying, individual conditions were examined, and meaning was found (Jacobson, 2001).

### **Justification for Symbolic Interactionism**

These studies consider how individuals make meaning of a given phenomenon, just as I do in this study. I am using SI because I seek to understand my participant's experiences and its strength is understanding the other's point of view. I considered the cultural, historical, and social context of the students' experience and how this can influence meaning of a given phenomenon. The language and dialogue between participants and myself allowed meaning to be understood and interpreted within the context of their stories. Using dialogue via in-depth interviews, I captured meaning participants gave to food insecurity and their use of the campus food pantry. Food insecurity is multidimensional in nature and in using SI provides a deeper understanding as meaning emerges.

### **Chapter Summary**

The topics in this literature review all have a place at the table when discussing an individual's experience with food insecurity and campus food pantries. For the purposes of this study, the consideration of the multidimensional aspects, potential impacts, coping strategies, and food experiences drove the questioning route and interactions with participants. In conducting this literature review, I am aware of additional avenues, which can be explored under the larger umbrella topic of food insecurity and resource utilization for those students in need. For purposes of this study, I focused on the individual's story, including how they make meaning of their experience with food insecurity and use of a campus food pantry, how these meanings influence experience with foods received and used from the food pantry, and how these meanings impact participants' food choices and diet quality.

### **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

The first two chapters have presented information on the prevalence and impact of food insecurity among students at HEIs. Currently, there is limited research on students' perspective of food insecurity and their use of campus food pantries. Thus, it is timely to investigate this topic and in this section, the research agenda used to begin addressing this issue is reviewed.

#### **Review of Research Questions**

In this section, I define the constructivist and interpretivist blended paradigm, epistemology, ontology, and narrative methodology used in this research study to address the following research questions concerning food insecurity among students enrolled in a rural HEI. The following research questions guide this research agenda:

- Q1     How do participants make meaning of their experience with food insecurity?
- Q2     How do participants make meaning of their experience with using a campus food pantry?
- Q2a    How do interactions with others in participants' lives influence meaning given to campus food pantries?
- Q2b    How has participants' meaning of their experience with the campus food pantry evolved over time?

The following research questions provide additional understanding surrounding how participants' make meaning of their experiences. I considered these to be sub questions to the above research questions:

- Q3     How do participants' meaning of their experience with food insecurity and the campus food pantry impact how they utilize food received in their total diet?
- Q4     How do participants' meaning of their experience with food insecurity and the campus food pantry impact their food choices and diet quality?

Active collaboration with participants was critical to make meaning of and understand their experience of food insecurity and using a campus food pantry. I was transparent in my intentions with participants when conducting this research. I worked with participants to ensure their voices and perspectives were accurately portrayed in Chapter IV and V.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

Qualitative research allows the researcher to better understand the depth of humans lives and the world in which they live (Jones, Torres & Arminio, 2006). Qualitative research agendas often include a paradigm, epistemology, ontology, methodology, data collection, and analysis methods. In this chapter, I describe each of these aspects of this research agenda.

#### **Paradigm**

For this research design, I borrow from different tenets housed in related paradigms. During the dissertation proposal presentation and discussion, it was apparent I was using aspects of two different paradigms, constructivism and interpretivism. Many



scholars use these terms interchangeably (Lincoln et al., 2011; Creswell, 2013), yet there is some distinction between the two paradigms which helped me explain my research design in a different context. After reviewing content of both and understanding the use of blended paradigms in research design, I have rewritten this section to include more clarity for the reader.

A paradigm is composed of a set of interconnected and related assumptions or beliefs (Jones et al., 2006). It is a conceptualization of knowledge construction and its basic beliefs are embedded in an epistemology, ontology, and methodology. By blending aspects of the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms an enhanced research design can be created, allowing for a rich understanding of the phenomenon and its complexity (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010).

**Constructivist paradigm.** The constructivist paradigm allowed me to derive shared meaning around the phenomena under study, food insecurity and campus food pantry use. This paradigm usually develops a pattern of meanings, inductively as part of the research process (Creswell, 2013). Meaning was shared between participants and I, and their experiences were understood within a given context. This meaning is specific to their situation, because everyone has unique experiences and meaning will vary among each experience.

My role as the researcher when using this paradigm, is to situate myself within the research process, creating space for individuals to share their story through an interactive process (Mertens, 2015). My perspective may be influenced by the research process and interactions with participants. They are co-researchers I collaborated with to socially

construct reality (Guido et al., 2010). In using this paradigm, construction of meaning between participant and myself requires a reflective and transparent process. I bring my individual values and beliefs into the research process (Creswell, 2013). Research questions emerge as data were collected, evolving based on dialogue created between participants and me (Mertens, 2015). Types of studies which may commonly use a constructivist paradigm include phenomenology, ethnography, narrative inquiry, and case study (Mertens, 2015; Lauckner, Paterson, & Krupa, 2012); studies focusing on data collection methods including participant observation, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis (Mertens, 2015).

**Interpretivist paradigm.** The interpretivist paradigm allowed me to enter the study with some knowledge and insight. I remained open to meaning which was created during data collection as participants and myself collaborated allowing new knowledge to develop. This paradigm allowed me to understand and provide comprehension by interpreting participants' perceptions (Lincoln et al., 2011).

Interpretivism includes observation and interpretation. Observing includes participants in their environment, and non-verbal's or other aspects of an individual's demeanor. Interpreting attempts to understand the phenomenon by focusing on the meaning individuals give to aspects of the topic under study in their world (Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2015). To have understanding one must have interpretation; in comprehending one's world and others' it is important to understand it through efforts to interpret it (Angen, 2000). Types of studies which commonly use an interpretivist paradigm include phenomenology, ethnography, and narrative inquiry (Lincoln et al.,

2011); studies focusing on data collection methods including participant observation and interviewing.

**Justification for constructivist/interpretivist paradigm.** I am borrowing perspectives from both paradigms, thus blending them. From the constructivist paradigm, I borrow the notion of meaning making which is shared and socially constructed between researcher and participant (Creswell, 2013). As an emerging researcher, aspects of this paradigm align with the way I view the world and interact within it. In my daily interactions, I believe meaning is enhanced and created via individuals' interacting with each other using a collaborative dialogue. Participants provide description of their experience of food insecurity and use of a campus food pantry as they know it in their world. This allows them to illustrate aspects of their experience and the culture in which it is crafted. As dialogue unfolded between participants and me, shared meaning was derived from each participants' experience with food insecurity and use of the campus food pantry.

From the interpretivist paradigm, I borrow the notion of understanding and interpreting participants' experiences and perceptions. I emphasize interpretation, which considers participants' views they bring to their story. I know this topic has different meanings for participants and me, because we all interact with the world differently. The stories shared between the participant and me allowed an opportunity to understand each other's differences and how these shape our perspectives of food insecurity and campus food pantries. Within this paradigm, I had to ensure during data collection and analysis to actively engage the participant in the research process so their story and its

interpretations were represented the way they were intended; this process allowed me to keep participants' story intact (Creswell, 2013) and their stories' integrity remained present.

As an emerging researcher, I believe in listening to others to comprehend and understand their perception is critical. Individuals' experiences and words can be interpreted without understanding, leading to assumptions and false information. I believe in interpreting perceptions, I need to understand the other's world in which they live.

### **Epistemology**

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge. It is how we know what we know, what it means to know (Crotty, 1998), and thus how we develop meaning. In using this blended paradigm, the participants and I do not separate ourselves from what we know; who we are and how we understand our world is central to the research process (Lincoln et al., 2011). For example, individuals encounter various phenomena in their world and make sense of these in relation to their own culture, environment, and experience (Crotty, 1998). How participants know truth is understood in a subjective manner and is based on one's experiences and observations.

I chose this blended paradigm and its epistemological foundation because it can explore individual's meaning surrounding food insecurity and the use of a campus food pantry. The truth of what each of us knows offers and brought to the research study differences between each of our experiences, yet also provides opportunity to explore similarities which can occur surrounding the meaning they give to these phenomena.

## **Ontology**

Ontology is the nature of reality (Creswell, 2013). For this blended paradigm, a relativist ontology is described assuming one's reality is constructed socially through meanings and understandings (Lincoln et al., 2011). Within this paradigm, meaning is shared between the participant and me, as I engage with them to understand the depth and magnitude of the given phenomena (Guido et al., 2010), food insecurity and campus food pantry use. Subjective reality is evident and multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge emerge (Mertens, 2015). This reality leads individuals to see their world through a specific lens, suggesting different people construct meaning differently (Guido et al., 2010). All knowledge, and thus all meaningful reality is dependent upon individual practices.

I chose this blended paradigm and ontological foundation because I am interested in exploring individual's meaning surrounding food insecurity and the use of a campus food pantry. The information they share with me alters the meaning I have on the above phenomena, even as I bring my perspective and values to the dialogue created. In sharing our stories, we both provide understanding for the other, shaping the meaning given to food insecurity and campus food pantries, through this social construction.

## **Methodology: Narrative**

Methodology is the plan of action or approach to systemic inquiry (Creswell, 2013). I used narrative inquiry as the methodology to provide specific direction for the procedures used in this research agenda. Narrative methodology was chosen because I am interested in the meaning of their experience of food insecurity among students

enrolled in a rural HEI and their use of a campus food pantry. In deriving shared meaning of individual's lived experiences, I asked participants what their experience is with food insecurity, and using a campus food pantry, how this has changed over time and what has influenced this experience. Meaning was explored to elucidate how it impacts foods received and used from the campus food pantry, and participants' food choices and diet quality. Since the focus of the research questions is on the meaning of the experience of participants use of a campus food pantry over time, a qualitative narrative methodology design is used.

**What is narrative?** Narrative inquiries, include written or spoken text about a phenomenon in one's life. The stories individuals share about phenomena are a form of narrative experience while the experience is the stories people live happening narratively (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Through story, I can more clearly understand participant's views and how their experience has shaped these views. The proposed research agenda focuses on understanding the experiences of students, gathering data through the collection of individuals' experiences (Creswell, 2013).

The use of narrative inquiry comes out of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. These experiences shape their daily lives, contributing to who they and others are (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Meier & Stremmel, 2010). As well, humans interpret their past in terms of these stories. The story is a portal through which a person enters the world and their experience is interpreted and made meaningful to them through these stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

These stories serve as a primary means for understanding the patterns in individual's lives (Wang & Geale, 2015), usually composed of constant, mundane features in everyday environments (Chase, 2011). The story is what readers need to hear more about to establish meaningful relationships and vibrant communities (Chase, 2011). In using narrative methodology, the stories from participants allowed for understanding about food insecurity and campus food pantries which can assist others working with students in this situation. Using narrative allowed the complexity of these phenomena to be captured via a collaborative dialogue. Through this narrative process, meaning developed due to the nature of listening and understanding which occurs as participant's share their stories. Four terms structure the process of narrative inquiry to understand this pattern - living, telling, retelling, and reliving (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006; Meier & Stremmel, 2010). Understanding the difference between living and telling is an important distinction when using this methodology.

Most narrative approaches begin with telling. The researcher interviews participants who tell their story; a life experience lived in the past. The product is the story told. Thus, the primary method is the interview, whether interest is on stories told or on interpretations and meaning generated (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Living is discussing experiences and observing them as they unfold. The living component comes with intention. Intention is what will happen in the future as the experience unfolds (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This temporality is one dimension of the narrative inquiry space and will be discussed in more detail in a subsequent section. Stories are then retold and relived as they are shared with others.

**History of narrative inquiry.** Clandinin and Connelly (2000), two pioneers in narrative research, spent years studying and providing context for this type of research. Three influences commonly found in narrative research are provided: three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, phenomenon and method, and the researcher-participant relationship. These drive the techniques and procedures utilized in answering research questions presented in this study.

Dewey (1934) takes a key term, experience, and provides a personal and social context that is always present. People cannot just be understood as individuals, but are always understood in relation with their environment in a social context. He speaks of continuity, otherwise known as temporality; experiences grow out of other experiences, leading to further experiences (Dewey, 1934).

Alasdair MacIntyre (1981) describes the notion of narrative unity. This concept dives deeper into the continuity of individual's lives. It allows the researcher to see the phenomena as an expression of stories overlapped in personal and social context and think narratively as they interact with participants.

Robert Coles (1989) blends life, teaching, and his psychiatry practice; at this intersection narrative comes to life in a different way. Coles learns about life from the patients he interacts with and the students he teaches. Narrative for him is the origin of it in the field; it is the intimacy of the researcher and the participant (Coles, 1989).

The above concepts drive the context of narrative research. Continuity or temporality, personal and social, narrative as a phenomenon and method, and the



researcher-participant relationship will be examined further in the next section. They all influence narrative methodology.

***Three-dimensional narrative inquiry space.*** Clandinin and Connelly (2000, 2006) define the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space and this framework allows inquiries to travel within this space. These terms are derived from Dewey's view of experience and include personal and social (interaction), past, present, future (continuity or temporality), and place (situation). They further define these terms by focusing on the movement of these inquiries: inward and outward, backward and forward. Inward refers to the internal feelings and reactions emerging when using this methodology, while outward includes the environment surrounding the phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Backward and forward refer to the temporality or movement of the narrative between, past, present, and future. Place is the specific boundaries in which the inquiry is situated. Thus, the narrative is structured with a plot (temporality) in a context (social and personal), and scene (place) where the action occurs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). When collecting data in the field, it is crucial for the researcher to be aware of where they are and their participants in each moment using the above three-dimensional space as a guideline. In this research study, the social, historical, and cultural context of individual's stories is situated within this three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. This information is displayed in Table 1.

Narrative inquiry is a simultaneous exploration of all three of the above terms (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Individuals tend to spontaneously describe things as they are, however in narrative inquiry it is important to always be asking what else do I need

to know, to understand the phenomena in terms of its temporal history. Narrative researchers are concerned with the personal conditions and their surrounding factors and influences on the given experience. These people, places, and things need to be understood to properly engage in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). As well, all events take place in some setting. The specificity of the location in which data are collected is crucial and needs to be acknowledged. Place may change as the inquiry unfolds and data are gathered, impacting the study, while providing the space and comfort for the participant to tell their story. It can refer to the location a narrative took place and how activities occurring in this location may have influenced their experience (Wang & Geale, 2015).

For example, two individuals enter a house (place) together, one born and raised in the house (temporality), and the other coming into the house for the first time (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). They will experience the exact same events (personal and social) of entering the house together, walking up the drive, opening the door and entering the living room. However, their experience of the experience is not the same (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Understanding this concept of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, shapes how the researcher re-stories the account during data analysis, which is discussed later in this chapter.

***Phenomenon and method.*** Narrative inquiry is a way of thinking and making sense of experience; it is both a phenomenon and methodology (Meier & Stremmel, 2010). To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a view of the experience as a phenomenon under study. A narrative approach during data collection was used to

Table 1

*Three-dimensional narrative inquiry space*

Interaction		Temporal/Continuity			
Personal	Social	Past	Present	Future	Situation/Place
Look inward to feelings, reactions and hopes	Look outward to the conditions surrounding the environment with other people and circumstances	Look backward to lived experiences, feelings and stories told	Look at current experiences, feelings and stories being told	Look forward to possible experiences that could occur, feelings and stories waiting to be told	Look at context, time and setting in which the story was told and took place

Adapted from Clandinin & Connelly (2000, 2006); Wang & Geale, 2015).

capture participants lived experiences of food insecurity and use of campus food pantries from three different perspectives. This allowed real-life experiences to be understood, interpreted, and presented through the stories of participants.

***Researcher-participant relationship.*** The relationship between the participant and me requires bracketing of myself into the research process (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Therefore, in using a blended paradigm, knowledge construction is embedded in this narrative methodology. Each participant and I actively collaborated allowing for a transparent and reflective relationship to develop as the stories unfold. The process of storytelling provides the opportunity for dialogue and reflection, exploring these concepts within each relationship. To understand the impact of narrative, each story is influenced by the individual narrating it, while addressing similarities and differences between and across stories (Meier & Stremmel, 2010), during interpretation.

Part of this relationship allows me to be oriented to the particulars of the story instead of the generality (Chase, 2006); at times, the participant assumes I want to hear about the generalities. It is the particular, not the general, that triggers emotion and allows for an authentic narrative. By developing collaborative, open dialogue as data collection unfolds, I began to know what is “story-worthy.” Through this process, listening to the voices within each narrative, “narrative linkages” develop between the particulars in the participants' and my life (Chase, 2006).

What is told is shaped by this relationship. When I encourage responses and discussions on one point, still other points can be left uncovered or less developed. The field text which develops as data collection occurs is shaped by the interest or disinterest

of the participant and me (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Both voices need to be heard to capture the magnitude of the narrative inquiry in this research process (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). We work together to share information and both voices capture meaning surrounding the phenomena of interest. By reviewing data collected throughout the research process, additional questions and clarification allow this dialogue to continue to unfold and provide greater understanding surrounding food insecurity and campus food pantries.

**Narrative inquiry in literature.** Clandinin & Connelly (2000) provide examples of narrative inquiries from several studies. These examples provided insight in the development of the current research agenda. One example of narrative inquiry provided understanding of the experience of four mothers whose sons were labeled behavior disordered. Much of the research in this area was diagnosis, assessment, and treatment of these individuals to determine educational placement for remediation. However, mother's experiences were silent and it was within this silence, the researcher positioned her narrative inquiry (Mickelson, 2000). This allowed for the creation of research text illuminating experiences not only of and for the mother, but highlighting social and personal interaction, shaping the mothers' relationships with her children (Mickelson, 2000). Using this approach, in the current research study provided an opportunity for the voices of the students to be strengthened, while gaining understanding of student's experience with food insecurity and use of the campus food pantry.

In another article, parental stories of the death by suicide of a young adult child were illustrated. Five families were interviewed in an interactive, engaging, “one-step-

forward, two-steps-back” journey, not in a linear fashion (Maple & Edwards, 2010). In hearing the voices of parents and their stories, the researcher could understand the parents’ issues in a way that kept their stories intact (Maple & Edwards, 2010). Given the blended paradigm shaping the current study, the intent was to keep my participants' stories intact and allow these silent voices to come to life.

**Justification for narrative methodology.** Food insecurity is a multidimensional phenomenon. Thus, the narrative inquiry space allows past, present, and future experiences to be discussed in a safe space, while uncovering parts of the story throughout data collection. Cultural, historical, and social context emerge as participants tell their stories. Individual meaning is embedded with cultural meaning and narrative approaches lead to deeper understanding of their experience when considering this aspect (Emden, 1998a). By forming a relationship with participants, I allowed an opportunity for them to be open and honest via a transparent dialogue, creating a safe space to tell their story. Narrative inquiry serves as a primary means for understanding the patterns in individual's lives (Wang & Geale, 2015). In using narrative inquiry, I allow the reader to more fully understand the students’ experiences.

The particulars of the experience are highly valued in the narrative inquiry process. By using various data collection methods and engaging with participants several times throughout the research process, I captured the struggles, tensions, and triumphs of using a campus food pantry. Using narrative allowed me to create a new sense of meaning and significance for students using this support service on HEI campuses.

Four parts of the research agenda were highlighted in this section and an explanation of why the paradigm, epistemology, ontology, and methodology were chosen. Using this research design allowed for shared meaning of students' experiences while being conscious of the dialogue and parts of the story throughout data collection. These interactions allowed for consideration of how individuals act towards people and things based on the meaning these have for them and how these evolve over time. During this process, I formed relationships with participants, considering the temporality of their stories and the cultural, historical, and social context of their experiences. The research design allowed meaning to be made surrounding the experience of students enrolled in a rural HEI, using a campus food pantry.

### **Exploratory Study: Potential Higher Education Institution Impact**

To gain knowledge about campus food pantries, I conducted an exploratory study at various HEIs. There is information on campus food pantry logistics, such as: budget, needs assessment, and staffing, however there is a need to understand stakeholder involvement and lessons learned. This would allow me to understand more about food pantry directors' challenges, triumphs and goals for the future, giving me some insight into how students used the resource, what stakeholders needed for next steps, and ongoing sustainability.

A logic model was designed as part of an Evaluation Methods class taken in fall 2015. A logic model is a visual representation presenting consideration of relationships among resources used to operate a program, and changes or results to achieve desired outcomes (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2017). Stakeholders are interested in food

insecurity on HEI campuses because these individuals work directly with students who are in need and realize they could benefit from this support service. In assisting students, HEIs can potentially retain and persist more students (Broton, & Goldrick-Rab, 2016).

I interviewed seven food pantry directors and visited four food pantries on various rural and urban campuses. When speaking to these individuals and reading additional comments via email communication, many themes emerged. All food pantries served various numbers of students each year. The need of each was recognized by stakeholders on each campus, but how each food pantry evolved was unique. Themes developed during data analysis included creativity in meeting student's needs, collaboration, and implementing additional educational resources.

### **Creativity in Meeting Student's Need**

For the Assistant Dean of Students at a southeastern university the idea of a food pantry became her pet project:

I work with a variety of advocacy work...In doing so, I realized that many students are in financial crisis and they are trying to stretch their dollars. I had a friend at [another university] that had started a food pantry and I was like there is no way that I can do that....and he was like I started with a 6" X 6" book shelf in a closet (J. Stewart, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

This innovation and resourcefulness to meet a student need was apparent at many of the pantries contacted:

The idea of the food pantry originated from an anthropology class a couple years ago. The instructor assigned us into groups and one group chose to develop an idea for an on-campus food pantry. The purpose was to tie into food, culture, and other aspects of this degree program...working with the Dean of Students, the group was able to develop a model for the on-campus food pantry (N. Brown, personal communication, November 10, 2015).



Many individuals interviewed allowed students to complete an information sheet and meet with food pantry representatives to gather data on students' needs. This also allowed an opportunity for stakeholders to provide information on additional resources, available to students in the community, such as SNAP. Often students are graduate students with families, who meet non-traditional criteria and additional financial concerns.

### **Collaboration**

Many of the food pantries could not function without the assistance of other stakeholders on campus, including the food pantry directors. Depending on how long the food pantry has been open, it is apparent department collaboration, organizational involvement, and volunteer opportunities have increased:

Currently we partner with the Freshman Leadership Program (FLP) here at [this university]. Specifically, we partner with the FLP SERVE group, which focuses on community service. Student from this group staff the food pantry during set hours twice a week, preparing food bags, maintaining inventory, etc. Additionally, we receive donations from various student organizations (C. McLean, personal communication, November 3, 2015).

Many food pantries have an advisory board with several stakeholders on campus involved:

The members on the board vary from the Director of Campus Dining to Assistant Manager at one of the convenience stores in the Commons. Aside from that, we partner with various organizations to help us with running the pantry when we are open (S. Crane, personal communication, November 5, 2015).

At another university, the student pantry is run by an Associated Students organization:

We also have an Advisory Committee that is volunteer run with about seven different organizations and positions on campus represented. We also are very focused on coalition building and work with our leadership team here to further engage with a variety of partners and identify groups of students that may have

limited resources - including nutrition education, health and wellness initiatives (T. Nguyen, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

By bringing together a multidisciplinary approach addressing food insecurity, stakeholders can work with different needs of students, allowing for awareness and understanding surrounding their experience with food insecurity and using a campus food pantry. As well, a strong collaboration and understanding of the various individuals involved with food insecurity on campus, can provide students with support systems and networks within an institution and in the larger community setting.

This collaboration can work to address larger policy issues concerning food insecurity at the HEI level, which may establish continued nutritional needs post high-school. One recent policy brief, focused on the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) being expanded to include colleges and universities to promote college completion (Goldrick-Rab, Broton, & Colo, 2016). Under current NSLP rules, students receive free or reduced price lunches based on their family income. This policy change would require modifying authorizing legislation to redefine “school” and extend program participation to include adults, a consideration for HEIs (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016).

### **Implementing Additional Educational Resources**

Many food pantries offered some passive and active education on nutrition and basic culinary skills. The biggest barriers were time, space, lack of resources for a food budget and equipment, not enough volunteers, no access to a nutritionist, and limited feedback from students who use the pantry to know if it would be useful:

We provide a handout of healthy recipes that can be made with ingredients from our food pantry. We also let students know about the university’s full time

nutritionist on staff, who can provide nutrition counseling should they be interested (C. McLean, personal communication, November 3, 2015).

At one university, the food pantry staff has intentionally thought of unique ways for students to receive messaging:

We post healthy recipes using the ingredients found in the food pantry. We also have had food demonstrations using healthy ingredients. Flyers are also inserted in students' bags relating to various topics about good nutrition/healthy decisions, cooking healthy on a budget, beverage choices, etc (K. Zuidema, personal communication, November 4, 2015).

At another university:

We are also working on a food/nutrition basic skill pilot project which is outreach on our end that may be helpful to our clients. This will allow us to indirectly work with food and nutrition capacities (T. Nguyen, personal communication, November 10, 2015).

Others are still in the working stages:

We have been working with a class that deals with food insecurity and hope to continue to partner with them. I do have some recipes available for dishes that can be made with items from the pantry shelves for any student who is interested...I hope to work with some students in the near future who can help us figure out what the immediate needs of the students are and what would be helpful to them" (G. Yerdon, personal communication, November 9, 2015).

A food pantry is a prime venue for providing additional education related to nutrition and healthy lifestyles. Allowing opportunity for understanding knowledge, attitudes, and self-concepts of students and how they make the purchasing decisions they do, can provide space for assessing appropriateness of resources at campus food pantries. As well, it helps identify additional services the pantry could provide in the future and should be considered as part of a strategic plan.

## **Lessons Learned**

Conducting interviews and email communication were helpful to gain insight into the operations of a campus food pantry and the need for these services by students. Resources are limited at some HEIs, so creative and innovative solutions need to be developed, offering various models for implementation at these institutions. Evaluating resources, staffing needs, and potential collaborations will assist these programs in planning a sustainable support service that best meets students' needs. There is a need for consistent feedback, additional education resources, and understanding of the student population using these services. In understanding the student population, HEIs and their stakeholders can ultimately develop resources and programming that meet varied students' needs using campus support services, such as a campus food pantry. This research agenda begins to address these varied needs, considering their multidimensional features, and the meaning participants' give to their experiences with food insecurity and using the campus food pantry.

## **Data Collection Methods**

Methods are the specific data collection procedures and techniques utilized to answer research questions (Creswell, 2013). For this study, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and photo elicitation were used to collect data. I use rich description to develop shared meaning between participants and me, of their lived experience with food insecurity and using a campus food pantry, which focused on consistency of evidence across sources of data to confirm emerging themes (Mertens, 2015). In this

section, I explain how and where I selected participants, the sampling criteria chosen and data collection methods used in detail.

### **Institutional Demographics**

Participants were selected from RMI, a four-year public institution in a rural city near the Rocky Mountains. This institution offers bachelor, master, and doctoral programs. The student population of RMI is composed of students who identify as white (60%), with the remaining 40 percent, Asian, Hispanic, two or more races, nonresident alien or race unknown (USDE: NCES, 2017). Most undergraduate students in fall 2014 were 24 years of age and under, and most graduate students were 25 and over.

### **Study Site Location: Campus Food Pantry Characteristics**

This institution has offered a food pantry since 2014. The food pantry allows students to access 10 items weekly, which can be used for small meals, snacks, or supplement existing food resources for the month. A pantry graduate assistant (GA), within the Dean of Students Office, oversees the program management and coordination of the campus food pantry. The pantry GA also supervises a student staff of three who are, “the face of the office, the first person they see, they help with appointments for students” (T. Mporampora, personal communication, December 2, 2016). There are many volunteers helping with the pantry, completing hours for various school projects or conduct resolutions. The pantry GA will hold this position for the 2016-2017 academic year and works 20 hours a week.

The campus food pantry is housed in the Central campus historic district. It is in a beautiful two story building with a yellowish stucco exterior and long white paned

windows with grayish, brown roofing. In December, when I visited, the lawn, walkway and bushes leading to the front door entrance were dusted with snow. As you enter the building, the refurbished floors creak under your feet. Upon entering the pantry from either two entrances, there is a comfortable and social feel to the open space which encloses the front office. To your right, as you enter from the front of the building, is where students “check-out” pantry items with a student worker and straight ahead down a narrow-carpeted staircase is the food pantry. I have entered this building many times and am always greeted by a graduate student or staff within seconds. They are always cheerful, and ensure I am connected to whom I have come to see. Housed within this building is the Dean of Students, Student Outreach and Support, Student Rights and Responsibilities, Students Legal and Student Judiciary.

On this day, I stood in the front room with a large window. Natural light streamed through and with the dusting of light snow, students, staff, and faculty were bustling by in their heavy coats. There is a large desk for the student workers to use and a couch, table, and two computers for student use. There is a small candy bowl on the table for visitors to grab as needed. Two student workers and one staff member were in and out of the main office working.

The pantry consists of one basement room, with signage out front, a comment box, recipe cards, and bags for students to use for their items as needed. After selecting items, students walk upstairs and “check-out” with the student worker at the front desk. As of December 2016, 208 individuals visited the pantry a total of 670 times for the fall semester. Several pictures of the space are in Appendix B.

The pantry was established in fall 2014 and is open year-round for students to receive up to 10 items weekly:

We get a number of donations...There is a payroll deduction for faculty and staff, and students, faculty, and staff bring food, there are many organizations that host an event and they say if you bring a can you can do this...there is a garden on campus so if they have an influx of produce they bring it in or there is a farmer's market and if they don't sell everything they may bring it in. The campus garden...bought in a bunch of squash during this Thanksgiving harvest and they have bought in squash and zucchini and onions and an assortment of things (T. Mporampora, personal communication, December 2, 2016).

The pantry has four large stainless steel shelves that have about four shelves each, holding various cans, boxes, and single snack items. There is also a mini fridge and a deep freezer.

The pantry GA has a budget established for the pantry for the 2016-2017 fiscal year and buys foods to supplement items donated. She purchases items from area grocery stores, such as, King Soopers, Save-A-Lot, Walmart, and Sprouts. She purchases perishable items, including fruits, vegetables, meats, bread, cheese, eggs, milk, and freezable meals, "which students love" (T. Mporampora, personal communication, December 2, 2016). She shops on Mondays and Fridays, with a budget of about \$250.00-300.00 a week. Students can take produce in addition to the 10 items provided for the week. Fresh fruits or vegetables are not counted towards the 10 items students can receive weekly, yet are not the first items students take during their visits:

Whenever we get produce, students don't always go for the produce which is strange to me because one of my first things when I started was we need to get healthier foods... like if I see berries I will get them. We tailor our advertising to assist with how to use or cook a certain food or produce we are offering. But even I have bought tomatoes and looking at all cultures what would be a base for preparing a meal and typically they go bad (T. Mporampora, personal communication, December 2, 2016).

However, as noted by the pantry GA, she was unsure if this was due to knowledge on how to use certain items, possible refrigeration space, or these items do not provide the same satiety as other non-perishable items. This is an area which needs to be further evaluated.

The pantry GA also uses an online tool, The Food Pantry Manager (FPM) software, which allows all items received from the food pantry to be accounted for when students “check-out” each time they visit the pantry. All students’ information is housed in this software, including how often students visit. This online tool helps food pantry managers with efficiency when helping those in need (Food Pantry Manager, 2017), and data can be used to determine how often students used the pantry and the items they received.

The pantry GA has been an integral part of moving the pantry forward and advocating for resources which allow the operations to run smoother. The most commonly donated items include pasta sauce, pasta, muffin mix, milk, cheese, egg, bread, ground beef, chicken, freezer meals, and berries. There is also a comment box available for students to request certain items or many have left a note of appreciation. There are recipe cards posted that incorporate common pantry items for the students.

Part of the pantry G.A.’s role is to develop a three-year strategic plan including how to implement different programs and marketing plans to move the pantry forward. The food pantry has partnered with many programs on campus including, a leadership class, the business school, and the nutrition department. Their biggest tool is word of mouth via campus tours, social media sites, and collaborations and relationships they



have maintained throughout the year. Recently, the pantry GA she has begun posting information about campus hunger, wellness, and other educational tools for students use. Hopefully this will help, “educate people so they know how to use it and we know why they are here for it” (T. Mporampora, personal communication, December 2, 2016).

### **Participant Selection**

Participant selection was limited to students using a campus food pantry. This institution was chosen due to access I had to a gatekeeper, the food pantry GA. It also offered a campus food pantry for students.

**Sampling strategy.** Sampling strategy implies a plan for identifying potential participants who can provide insight on the topic being studied (Jones et al., 2006). Sample size relates to the type of research being conducted (Mertens, 2015), and both will be discussed later in this section. Some variables drive the number of participants selected including time to complete the study, pool from which one is selecting participants, and individuals willing to participate.

For this study, I used purposeful, convenience sampling (Merriam, 2009). Purposeful sampling allowed me to employ understanding of the specific phenomena studied among participants, meeting a specific inclusion criteria: students were between 18-70 years of age and using a campus food pantry. These criteria were selected to ensure a variety of students; traditional and non-traditional student features were considered. All students needed to be using the campus food pantry since the focus of the research study was on their experiences with using this resource. Convenience

sampling occurred due to the specific geographic location, as well as alignment with the pantry GA to gain access to potential participants.

**Gatekeepers.** I engaged with the pantry GA employed at RMI and she served as my gatekeeper. She is an individual who knew which potential participants met the sampling inclusion criteria, and had access to these individuals (Jones et al., 2006). She interfaces with students using the campus food pantry at RMI daily. The pantry GA was initially contacted by email, and after the research was explained she agreed to assist with the study. I met her in person in the beginning of fall 2016 semester and was provided a tour of the campus food pantry and an explanation of the logistics of operation. We continued to have email exchanges throughout data collection and met again at the end of the semester to discuss further details about the pantry.

**Participant recruitment.** Before participant recruitment could begin an Institutional Review Board (IRB) expedited application was submitted. I submitted the application along with the consent form and appropriate attachments in early September 2016. The consent form is provided in Appendix C, and explains the research process to participants, risks and benefits, and how data will be handled. I had to make modifications to the original IRB applications and in late October was approved for expedited review. See Appendix D for IRB Review Board Approval. The pantry GA was contacted via email, once the research project had been approved. She had already been informed of the nature of the study and participant inclusion criteria. She sent an email, which I had crafted to all students using the campus food pantry, explaining the purpose of the study and inclusion criteria.

It is important to maintain diversity among participants, including gender, age, ethnicity, race, and student status. This allows for a sample which is diverse in a variety of characteristics, so the sample size is not composed of similar individuals (Mertens, 2015). Diversity allowed for differences among experiences, as well as providing the cultural, historical, and social context of individual's stories. I worked with the pantry GA explaining the importance of selecting a diverse sample. This allowed the pantry GA to understand how this could influence the study's findings and criteria for rigor. With a small sample size, this was crucial and included being conscious of gender, race, ethnicity, student status, dependents, and age.

Eight participants, meeting the inclusion criteria, indicated an interest in participating in the study. I contacted all eight students via email and four responded. Given the narrative inquiry chosen, the number of individuals selected attempts to capture the depth of information needed to answer the research questions.

After email exchanges and an initial phone meeting, three of the four agreed to participate. Initially, I continued to contact the other four over the course of three months, in hopes of expanding the sample size and there was no interest. Reasons for lack of interest was due to potential participant's busy schedule and unwillingness to devote the time needed for data collection. I worked with the pantry GA to identify additional participants throughout the data collection period.

Once the three potential participants were identified I contacted them via email and set up an initial phone interview. Prior to proceeding, participants reviewed with me the informed consent form (Appendix C), detailing their responsibilities within the study.

Participants were given the option to use their name or select a pseudonym to protect their identities and ensure confidentiality. All participants chose a pseudonym.

Participant selection is linked to the purpose of the study and the methodology chosen (Jones et al., 2006). Sample size often varies in qualitative research, due to the differences between methodologies. Guetterman (2015) analyzed over 50 frequently cited studies, using different methodological approaches. Of 10 narrative inquiry articles, the sample size ranged from one to 52, and differences occurred due to time, budget, purpose of study, and potential participant interest (Guetterman, 2015).

As data were collected, participants shared varying amounts of information. Some information pertained to the specific research questions and other information provided context for the individual's cultural, historical, and social makeup, aiding in understanding their current situation. The research design provided an emerging questioning route and allowed establishment of collaborative dialogue between participants and me. The data I collected allowed me to gain information which aligned with the research questions.

By using in-depth interviewing as a qualitative research method, the dimension and depth of data provided on the topic can drive the sampling size (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). As data were collected and analyzed, additional clarification from participants was needed. The three individuals recruited provided understanding in how they make meaning of food insecurity and their use of the campus food pantry. Thus, three participants were determined, based on the research designed used and initial data

analysis, to provide the depth and comprehension to begin exploring this topic and answer the research questions.

### **Research Procedures**

There are multiple data collection methods utilized in narrative inquiry including document analysis, field notes during observation and of shared experiences between researcher and participants, semi-structured interviews, and visual imagery (Chase, 2006). Data gathered reflected both breadth and depth (Merriam, 2009), regarding the student experience of food insecurity and using a campus food pantry. I tried to identify the content, structure, and forms of life stories based on the available data; capturing the content of the story, including a timeline of important events, or an exploration of the meaning of life events within a broader sociocultural context (Mertens, 2015). In narrative inquiry, data are collected until the final document is complete (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). What follows is an explanation of the procedures involved for each of the selected data collection techniques, and definitions of terms used in narrative research.

**Common narrative research terms.** Important terms used in narrative research include: being in the field, field text, and research text. These terms are used throughout the narrative process and allowed me to disseminate appropriate transitions and complexities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In the field occurs during data collection, interacting, and engaging with participants. It is where I worked within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. I needed to be aware of where participants and myself were at various moments during the research process.

Field texts allowed me to move between involvements with participants and create a distance from them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Field texts include all data collection methods, as well as my notes during data collection. All field texts are constructed representations of the experience. As the transition is made from field text to research text, the question reemerges as to the significance of the study. Narrative researchers are tasked with portraying the personal and social circumstances of the situation, transformed during time spent in the field (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I then began data analysis by taking field text and transitioning it into research text for the given audience, which would be reading the final document.

**Data collection methods overview.** Several data collection methods were used (Creswell, 2013) to provide a rich description of the participants' experience: document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and photo elicitation. I met with participants' various times over the course of three months during fall 2016. I met with each participant 4-6 times. I had one in-person meeting with each participant after initial virtual sessions; all other sessions were conducted over the phone or via skype. Information provided by participants included their use and experience with the campus food pantry.

Data collection required a minimum of six hours to engage in the three data collection methods described in the next section. Participants provided a varied amount of information at each meeting, thus time varied with participants depending on meeting lengths, journaling, and photo elicitation depth. During 4-6 interviews with each participant, an opportunity for them to tell their story was provided. This offered time

and space to develop rapport, introduce the purpose of the research and topic to be explored, allowed participants to fill out informed consent forms, and discuss the journaling and photo elicitation specifics. Though they used the pantry during data collection, they often had to recall experiences occurring earlier in the fall semester, thus relying on their memory while recounting their initial experiences with the pantry.

The subsequent meetings were focused on allowing time to explore specific research questions. There was an opportunity to discuss the journaling and photograph assignment at the beginning of each meeting, and I always allowed time for clarification, and follow-up questions after reviewing my notes from previous meetings. After data were collected, there continued to be opportunities for member checking, reviewing parts of participants' stories with them for further clarification, as initial data were analyzed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

***Document analysis.*** Documents may be written or printed records existing before the research study begins. Documents produced by participants as part of their regular daily activities include minutes from a meeting, professional reports or memos, and electronic sources (Lodico et al., 2010). I used participant journaling as document analysis for this study.

***Journaling.*** Participants were instructed to journal throughout the entire data collection process. Journaling could occur via written, typed notes, or audio recordings. Prompts were provided to encourage ongoing dialogue in between sessions and were based on the content of individual sessions. Prompts included: a) Is there anything you would like to add after our discussion this week that you were unable to say?; b) Is there

anything you would like to add about your experience with food insecurity that you were unable to say?; c) Is there anything you would like to add about your experience using a campus food pantry that you were unable to say?; d) Is there anything you would like to add about how you utilize foods received from the campus food pantry that you were unable to say?; e) Is there anything you would like to add about your diet quality that you were unable to say?; f) Is there anything you would like to add about the influence of your food experiences on your diet quality you were unable to say?; g) and was there anything left unsaid, that you like to add at this point. As well, the option for free writing was discussed between participants and myself, allowing an opportunity to highlight any internal feelings, thoughts, and emotions elicited by participants during this process. The data collected via these documents guided dialogue during the research process.

The journaling process provided access to the language and words of the participants when meetings were not occurring (Creswell, 2003). Parts of their story which they may not have felt comfortable discussing directly with me, could be told in a way that was more appropriate and relaxed for the participant. Journaling represented data which is thoughtful; participants need to be given time and attention to compile journal entries (Creswell, 2013).

***Semi-structured individual interviews.*** Semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with participants to explore their experience with food insecurity and using the campus food pantry. When interviewing, the semi-structured format allowed the conversation to flow naturally while gaining understanding around the phenomena of interest. I ensured a relational quality was present (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This



was accomplished by developing new questions as the interview proceeded, maintaining rapport with participants, and pursuing a different line of questioning based on the participant's lead (Polkinghorne, 2005). The flexible semi-structured interview is congruent with the blended paradigm chosen. The questions asked prompted participant's description of their lived experience and the overall account of the story was co-created by participants and myself (Polkinghorne, 2005).

By exploring their experiences, participants had an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of these events. The flexibility to modify questions and add probing to develop participant's thoughts, allowed an alternative perspective on the experience. During the interview process, more about the topic was uncovered. These unexpected and unanticipated aspects of the experience added meaning and significance to the experience of students using a campus food pantry.

An initial guide contained several questions developed to explore the phenomena of interest (Kelly, 2003). Appendix E contains sample questions asked of participants. However, the questioning route varied for each participant and emerged as data were collected. The initial meeting included questions about the participant. The intent was to understand who they were as a person regardless of their experience with food insecurity and the campus food pantry. Questions were asked about their university experience, social interactions, employment, interests, short-term and long-term goals, and any key experiences growing up which impacted their decision to obtain a degree. I introduced the purpose of the study and why I was interested in the topic. I defined terms used throughout the research process so there was context for what it is they were being asked

to do. I discussed my professional background and provided my story of food security and food experiences. The goal was to build rapport, allowing for open and honest conversation.

Within the context of this research design, interview questions evolved over time and were adjusted with each interview and pace of the participant dialogue (Mertens, 2015). Each interview with participants looked different depending on the information they disclosed providing opportunities for prompts. This conversation included interactions with others and specific places in which events occurred.

Additional meetings allowed time to explore specific research questions. There was an opportunity for flexibility in the questioning route and further probing. Participants were asked if they needed clarification on any of the items discussed during the previous meetings and there was an opportunity to review journal entries and discuss any photographs taken. There was continued effort to build rapport by asking how this experience had been for the participant thus far, and if there is anything needed to make them more comfortable with the process. Throughout this process, participants had an opportunity to provide additional information they felt was important and had been left unsaid. Participants were also provided additional time after initial data were collected to continue journaling about anything they believe was relevant to the purpose of this study.

The strengths of the interview process align with the paradigm, epistemology, ontology, and methodology chosen. During this process, data emerges through interactions between participants and me, allowing evaluation of ideas and feelings

surrounding information shared (Kelly, 2003). This allowed both participants and I to gain new knowledge through the application of dialogue and collaboration.

***Photo elicitation.*** Visual elicitation uses photographs, drawings, or other visuals to create collective and personal memory. This method puts cameras in the hands of participants who may not be involved in decision making processes, allowing them a voice and space to discuss their concerns and share their perspectives (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, & McCann, 2005; Genuis, Willows, Nation, & Jardine, 2015). It allows for critical reflection and dialogue by selecting photographs reflecting aspects of the phenomenon under inquiry. It then contextualizes the photographs by telling stories about what they mean (Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano, 1998), a process called photo elicitation.

Following the initial meeting, participants were asked to take photographs illustrating their use of the campus food pantry, including foods received and used in their total diet. Specific instructions are provided in Appendix E. I provided an example of a photograph I had taken to provide context for what I was asking them to do within this given method. Participants had the option to take photographs with their phone or with a disposable camera, provided to them upon request. Participants were required to fill out an additional consent form for photo elicitation protocols. They were provided with additional copies of the consent form for individuals who appear in their photo elicitation photographs.

At additional meetings, the participants and I focused on the content included in the photographs and any meaning presented. The purpose of this activity was to build

upon information collected in previous meetings by creating an environment, which allowed participants to share their reality, providing an opportunity for a deeper level of reflection (Creswell, 2003). Photo elicitation allows participants to capture attention visually, representing data, which expands understanding of food insecurity and their use of the campus food pantry.

Images can evoke deeper elements than words, because of the way the brain processes visual information (Harper, 2002). Using visual images allows for rich description of the topic being researched. By allowing participants the opportunity to tell their story through pictures, it empowers their voice. For example, one study captured visual imagery of Muslim women's experience in the United States after the September 11th terrorist attacks. The visual narrative explored changes in time and space of the women's feelings of fear and safety on one day outside their home in Ohio. These were used to highlight the impact of anti-Muslim hate violence in their daily lives (Kwan, 2008).

### **Reflexivity: Researcher Journal**

Reflexivity allows the researcher's voice to be part of the research process (Lincoln et al., 2011). My role in using the blended paradigm ensures I am positioned in the research. My perspective was influenced by the research process and interaction with participants. I brought my individual identity, beliefs and assumptions into the research process and discussion with participants (Crotty, 1998).

Throughout data collection, I engaged in written and audio recording reflective journaling. I recorded audio field notes after each interview and wrote down thoughts

and additional questions in between sessions with participants. This method of reflexivity allowed me to explore views surrounding my own understanding of food insecurity, as well as my interactions with participants during the research process (Jones et al., 2006). I became aware of what topics I needed to explore further with participants and had to be mindful of my own assumptions and beliefs in influencing inquiry (Watts, 2007). This process allowed me to determine how I came to understand certain topics participants discussed; in writing down my thoughts and reviewing them simultaneously with the transcripts, I gained insight into how I came to know what I know about the phenomena of interest.

I was transparent with participants in my intentions behind pursuing this topic, as well as how I planned to use findings. It was also important for me to reveal empathic, and apathic reactions I had to the participants or their stories, during the research process. I kept a detailed account of the data collection process and decisions made in asking certain questions or providing prompts to participants. This audit trail (Merriam, 2009), was helpful when analyzing data and restorying participants' stories, ensuring criteria for rigor.

I assisted the participants in producing a full and deep account of their story. This required different types of probing techniques and reflective listening with each participant. I had to ask questions a different way to allow participants to provide explanations which enhanced meaning. In probing, I gained greater depth in responses than if I had limited myself to asking a question only one way. Some of these techniques were determined during and after the initial and subsequent meetings. I provided myself

time to reflect upon between each meeting and this process drove the purpose of subsequent meetings. I then drafted how I could ask a question a different way. This process allowed responses to vary among participants' depending on how they originally answered the initial question.

### **Data Analysis**

The process of data analysis involves preparing and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2003). In narrative inquiry, data analysis requires restorying the participant's story with their input into a general framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The researcher needs to collaborate with participants by actively involving them in the process to restory the participants' narrative the way it was intended to be (Creswell, 2013). This can be difficult, because narrative analysis lends itself to multiple interpretations (Emden, 1998a). In analyzing data, I incorporated SI to inform interpretation of the dialogue presented between participants and me

Using SI as a guide, I considered themes identified during data analysis and how they were connected to three primary considerations: my participant's responses towards meaning they give their experience with food insecurity and using a campus food pantry; the meaning these experiences have as participants' interact with others in their environment, such as, campus support service providers, pantry workers, peers, and me; and meanings addressed and modified by participants' through, an interpretive process, to provide understanding around their experience of food insecurity and campus food pantry use (Blumer, 2008). This guided data analysis by allowing me to interpret how themes were incorporated into answering research questions presented. In defining meaning

participants' give to their experiences of food insecurity and using the campus food pantry initially, how interactions with others allowed meaning to emerge, and how this meaning was modified over time, understanding occurred capturing similarities and differences among these experiences. Within this process, I considered the participant's point of view and the cultural, historical, and social context from which meaning derived.

As data analysis began, I worked with a variety of field text. All interview audio recordings were transcribed and any written text or photographs copied and reviewed. I was careful to note dates, contexts for written text, and placement of my field notes or journal entries into participant field text. I also noted characters involved and the overall topic discussed for the given section of data to be analyzed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Self-reflection during the journaling process or in reviewing field notes, allowed for additional insights and opportunities to spark dialogue with participants, taking a different angle with parts of their story. All reflexive journaling was transcribed and used as research text.

It was important as I considered the data to position field text within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. In reading and rereading, I constructed a chronological and summarized account of what was contained in each of the field text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I avoided generalizing experiences and focused on the personal, social, and emotional qualities of participant's stories, a process called burrowing (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). These were organized into participant's profiles and modified as more data were collected and analyzed.

I read the field text several times, deleting side conversations, and interview questions which did not pertain to the research questions or the topic discussed. I also removed distractions, such as repeating a question or comment, a participant talking to someone in the background, or any parts where we got disconnected or could not hear each other. I read the remaining field text for its content which aligned with meaning surrounding the research questions and general information about each participant (Emden, 1998b). As I wrote, I continued to cut text which was distracting or did not add to the introduction of each participant or overall theme development. As the story developed, I returned sections to participants for further clarification, allowing for additional questions or enhanced understanding of the given section. This process of analysis and interpretation of the text was not sequential. During this time, I collected additional data and this required collaborating with participants on constructing and reconstructing parts of the story to capture the intended meaning.

I also employed writing as inquiry when taking field texts and writing drafts of research text into the participant's story. This data analysis practice is described by Richardson (2000) as a method of representing the words of participants. This allowed me an additional opportunity to ask for further clarification at subsequent meetings or after all initial data were collected, and refine parts of participants' stories. I used writing to process research text. This allowed me to think through each part of the participants' story, to restory their experiences, which were discussed in a non-chronological context over the course of several interviews and journaling.



Writing as inquiry allowed me to organize the research text in a different way; gaining understanding of participants' stories in a new light (Richardson, 2000). As I wrote, I had the ability to organize participants' stories in a way which could not be captured by reviewing individual field text in a linear fashion. This process allowed me to ask further questions and fill in blanks within the context of their stories, linking parts together and providing a more comprehensive narrative.

During this process, I also asked questions in a different way, to enhance responses allowing for deeper interpretation and understanding. I considered the importance of getting as close as possible to the answer of the research questions. As well, elaborating on various sections, which were identified as capturing meaning were revisited. Participants continued to be part of this process as I went back and forth between further data analysis and additional data collection.

### **Criteria for Rigor**

Criteria of rigor considers the quality of the research. Various criteria of rigor were considered for this qualitative research study. This assists in providing the reader with evidence that the information collected using the various methods is trustworthy and believable (Mertens, 2015).

Both trustworthiness and authenticity criteria are utilized to ensure rigor of qualitative research. Whereas trustworthiness refers to our ability to rely on and have confidence in the research findings, authenticity deals more with the outcomes of the study and potential influence of the research on others (Lincoln & Guba, 2011). What follows is an explanation of the four elements of trustworthiness, as well as the four

components of authenticity, and how I established each. Trustworthiness included credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Mertens, 2015).

Authenticity criteria included fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, and catalytic authenticity (Mertens, 2015).

Credibility refers to participants' perceptions of the topic compared to the researcher's portrayal (Lodico et al., 2010). Peer debriefing and member checks contribute to a study's credibility, as well as using multiple data collection methods. Engaging with peers not involved in the research, including colleagues who reviewed parts of the field text, allowed me to confront my beliefs on the data as the study proceeded. I gained outside perspectives and insight surrounding theme development and interpretation of meanings by engaging with peers. Member checks allowed me to verify with participants, themes, and potential meanings which developed during data collection and analysis. The dialogue created as part of the interview process allowed for member checking. By listening to participant's stories and allowing time and space to tell different parts of their story, consideration was made for how their perceptions compared to my interpretation (Mertens, 2015). I ensured space was left at the end of each meeting to review field notes and text, as well as follow-up with participants as data were analyzed. I collected data from three sources: participant journaling, interview transcripts, and photo elicitation. In using three sources of data collections, I intentionally considered multiple methods for consistency of evidence across sources of data to confirm emerging themes and provide a thick description (Mertens, 2015).

Transferability refers to how similar the research site is in comparison to other sites judged by the reader (Lodico et al., 2010). Careful description of the context, place, and timeframe allowed for thick description of the institution and campus food pantry characteristics. This permits the reader to compare the research setting with others (Lodico et al., 2010), though I discuss generalizability with future research considerations. This is not the goal of this research design, since I am restorying participants' stories. These stories, though situated in a context which may be like another, are unique (Lodico et al., 2010). Though similarities can occur in the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space it is difficult to replicate due to its multidimensional effects, while ensuring the integrity of each participant's story is maintained (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, allowing the reader to understand my perspective throughout the process can assist in understanding the interpretation of findings.

Dependability refers to how findings hold up over time (Mertens, 2015). Researchers must acknowledge and track procedures as data collection and analysis occurs. Thick description and member checking considered dependability. These techniques allowed the reader to understand the relationship between the researcher and participants, how this changed throughout data collection and analysis increasing the dependability of the research (Lodico et al., 2010; Mertens, 2015). Confirmability examines appropriateness of the data itself (Mertens, 2015). Peer debriefing, member checking, and thick description strengthen the confirmability of the study. I consistently reviewed the meaning of the stories throughout the data collection and analysis process

with peers and the participants, and provided different methods in which they could tell their story.

Authenticity refers to how fair the researcher is in their presentation of perspectives and beliefs throughout the research process. Fairness criteria consider how accurate the descriptions of the participants are as data collection occurs (Lodico et al., 2010). All participants were required to sign an informed consent to participate in the study, so they knew any benefits or risks to them and their rights as a participant. I also provided member checking to ensure information gathered about the participants, and their experiences and views, were accurate to their knowledge. This continued throughout the research process to ensure accuracy of the information participants shared with me. This also provided an opportunity to approach and explore any complexities of their story and its interpretations throughout process. What may have been unclear during data collection, was readdressed after initial data analysis to provide further clarity.

Ontological authenticity refers to whether the participant improved their individual understanding and learned something about themselves during the research process, while educative authenticity refers to an understanding of others' constructions of reality (Mertens, 2015). Continued dialogue and member checking allowed me to gain understanding on what participants received by taking part in the study. I asked reflective questions in the last interview about what they had learned about the process and how this had altered understanding they gave to these phenomena. We also

discussed how interactions they had with others influences their reality on this topic and what assumptions are made about food insecurity and using a campus food pantry.

Finally, catalytic authenticity is the extent to which participants stimulate action after taking part in the study (Mertens, 2015). Participant testimony via member checking can reveal participant's willingness to be involved and take additional action on the topic under inquiry after the research study has been conducted. Participants were given an opportunity to discuss the impact of the research process on their experience, as well as considerations for next steps for the campus food pantry. This provided an opportunity for feedback, both positive and constructive, which can be shared with the pantry GA.

### **Chapter Summary**

The qualitative narrative study explored experiences of students using a campus food pantry in the context of their own story. Research questions focused on their lived experience with food insecurity, and using a campus food pantry. As well, how their meaning of these experiences impacted foods received, foods utilized, and food choices from the pantry were considered. This study is informed by a constructivist and interpretivist blended paradigm, as participants and me collectively generated meaning around the research questions. Three data collection methods, document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and photo elicitation, were used to answer the research questions. Data analysis allowed restorying of the participant's story acknowledging new meaning and significance of this topic for stakeholders working with students using a campus food pantry.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **PARTICIPANT PROFILES AND THEMATIC DEVELOPMENT**

In this chapter I introduce study participants' narrative story and highlight aspects of their experiences as students using a campus food pantry. Each story was told over the course of three months using 4-6 semi-structured interviews per participant, intermittent journaling, and photo elicitation. Throughout this chapter, I use participant's words when possible to capture understanding shared via these three data collection methods.

In the first section of this chapter, Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha, the participants, are introduced by their chosen pseudonyms. Agatha's daughter, Noelle, is present in her story and a pseudonym was chosen for her. Each participants' profile contains background information about the student, their family, their college experience and financial support, as well as how they balance their day-to-day activities and challenges. I provide an overview of their use of the campus food pantry, items received fall 2016, and food experiences, offering context for features of their total diet, diet quality, and past and present food practices. These profiles allow the reader to gain understanding of Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha's experiences as students using the campus food pantry. See Table 2 for participant's characteristics. This introduction to the participants provides context for the themes which will be introduced in the second part of this chapter. Aspects of their story are dispersed within the data analyzed for theme development, so this background provides initial perspective surrounding each participant's life story.

Table 2  
*Participants' Characteristics*

Characteristics	Finn	Agatha	Zipporah
Age	18	33	22
Gender	Male	Female	Female
College Status	First-Year	Junior	Junior
Ethnicity	Mexican	Cuban/German American	African
Major	Software Engineer	Education	History
Work Status	9-10 hours/week	Varies – 10-25 hours/week	No
Food Budget	\$30.00/month	\$100.00/month	\$20.00-30.00/month
Number of dependents	0	1	0
Financial support for college	Scholarship	Scholarship	Financial Aid
Financial independent	Yes; except health insurance	Yes	Yes; except health insurance
Usage of food pantry: Fall 2016	4	13	13
Campus Meal Plan	Yes	No	No

Within these profiles, I describe how participants took photographs of items received and used in their diet from the campus food pantry. This data collection method required consistent prompting and discussion with all participants. Participants could use their camera phone, which Finn and Agatha could do with their devices. Zipporah did not have a camera phone, so I mailed her a disposal camera. I provided instructions on how to use it and collected it from her at the in-person interview. I introduce themes developed from analyzing data in the second section of this chapter. Themes included a) financial challenge identification; b) strategizing budget priorities; c) prioritizing health; d) food pantry uses and strategies; and e) having enough. The themes are intertwined and together provide enhanced understanding when described in the context of participants' life experiences.

### **Finn**

Finn, 18, is a first-year, traditional student from a large Western city, who began at RMI in fall 2016. He is of Hispanic heritage; bilingual in both Spanish and English. He came to the U.S. with his family from Mexico City when he was seven years old. His family consists of his dad, mom, two brothers, and a sister, of which he is the youngest child. When they immigrated to the U.S., his uncle (mom's brother), had recently moved, as well. Before they left Mexico, "we had our own house, we were doing pretty great, but my dad got fired because he was too old, he worked at *Ford*." When he first moved here Finn's whole family lived with his uncle in his basement. After a few weeks, his dad got a job and they could get their own place. Finn talks about during those first few weeks, "...we didn't have t.v., cable, and all this fancy stuff, we had the fridge, the



microwave and so like at first when we arrived we slowly, slowly saved up.” His family did not need the “fancy stuff”, they needed the food on the table which was provided each day. This was his dad’s main priority to make sure his family was fed and had a roof over their heads.

His dad now works in construction and his mom is currently unemployed. His sister and brother are both married, thus his brother and he were the only ones living at home with his parents prior to Finn leaving for college. He attended public schools in and played football since fifth grade.

When I asked why he chose RMI he stated, “I wanted to join the football team. I liked the college town and I wanted to stay in [my state] the class size was just right.” It was important for him to show his parents the potential he had to succeed in college. As one of three males in his family, one brother finished high school and the other did not, thus Finn was the first male in his family to go to college. His sister also went to college and graduated two years ago.

His career interest was nursing but recently he switched to software engineering. In reflecting on his choice of major he said, “I always wanted to go into computer programming but I didn’t really think it was a career that I could make a living out of...in the future it is going to be big and I could do well in it.” Finn has begun to explore career possibilities while at RMI, which he did not consider prior to beginning college.

### **Engaging with Finn**

Finn initially seemed excited to be part of the study and was open to chatting each week at the same time during the fall 2016 semester. He was consistent and was always

available for phone interviews. I conducted five interviews with Finn; four of the interviews were over the phone, and one was conducted in-person. These interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. Finn took two pictures which will be discussed. He was quiet and reserved over the phone, always answering questions in a confident and direct manner.

On the phone, I initially felt I was an inconvenience to Finn. I could tell in his voice some reluctance and he was potentially distracted. He was more comfortable with me during the second and third interview on the phone. I noted this in my reflective journaling, due to his tone of voice and general enthusiasm in sharing information on the topics we discussed. As the interview time went on for these sessions, his attention span decreased and responses became one word answers more often than in the beginning of the interview. Thus, I gained a sense of when I should continue or draw closure to the interview based on the depth of his responses.

As interviews progressed, when I asked him how his week went or about a specific event or test which we had discussed occurring between our weekly interviews, he was so thankful for me remembering these aspects of his life. I felt by inserting these connections with him and his life, we built rapport. I allowed him to understand I did care about his story, but I also cared about him as a person and the time he provided to this study.

He was my first participant and during the first couple interviews, I had trouble connecting with him on questions pertaining to food insecurity, total diet intake, and some details about the pantry. Initially, I could not help but compare the information I

was obtaining from him to the other two participants. There was less prompting and responses seemed to provide more critical thought from other participants. When analyzing data, I realized I needed to reword these questions for several reasons. First, Finn had never heard of these terms and I had not considered this a possibility. Second, even as I explained the terms it became apparent he had never thought of his experiences in the context of these terms. Finally, Finn had only used the pantry four times during fall semester, thus recall of his time spent at the pantry was less distinct and rich as I anticipated. Finn went in, selected his snacks or potential meal supplement, and “checked-out” with the student worker at the front desk. This process took roughly 10 minutes and did not involve as much mental preparation as I had expected, thus providing less depth in his responses throughout data collection.

During the fourth interview, which was in-person, Finn was much more animated and provided more detail than the phone interview. His friendly, kind demeanor was instantly welcoming and engaging, in stark contrast to our calls. He wore a RMI t-shirt and running pants, was unshaven, and had rugged dark hair. A high-school football player, he was muscular and towered over me at 6’3”.

### **Family and Financial Support for College**

Finn’s high school helped him prepare for college selection and financing, by providing advising and aiding with financial scholarships. Finn’s dad barely makes enough to support the expenses of his family, so Finn filled out various applications for scholarships. He received three for the 2016-2017 academic year and these were supporting his tuition, housing, and campus meal plan. One scholarship he receives pays

for a campus meal plan with 14 meal swipes per week. If used strategically he can receive two meals a day.

His father provided essentials for the family, though Finn worked throughout high school for additional income at a local burger joint and a carnival over the summer:

I kind of... I didn't get that much money. I would give a little bit to my mom so she had some to spend for herself, or I would use for little things like I used to help my dad with my phone and the little bit I had left I would use for lunch to go off campus.

Since his mom did not work, he often gave her a little bit of his salary so she could buy something for herself. He also provided additional monies, received through his part-time jobs, to his father to help supplement items he provided for him and his family.

The influence of his family helped in motivating him to attend college as well:

My school and my family were big drives for me to go to college, so when I was younger my dad always talked to me about how he regretted not having an education as a young kid and once I got to [high school] I got more pushed by teachers to get a better education and find a career to support me and my family when I was older.

His family is very proud of him for attending college, "...because only me and my sister went to college so it is a pretty big accomplishment." In high school, Finn was not as motivated as he has been the first semester of college. In high school, his grades always remained at or above a 3.0 GPA. Since arriving, his motivation has shifted because he is now focusing on a major he enjoys and can see a future; his drive to succeed academically has changed.

Finn described his role in the family to be tied to certain expectations. For Finn's family, the male is the primary caregiver of his future family:

So for me the expectation is to learn from the older member of the family's mistakes so you don't make the same ones, for me to succeed and not end up in a dead end job like [my father] did. Find something that will support a future family...and not just myself and barely have a job that just supports me.

As a male in his family, he is expected to provide for others. He always held a job in high school to help provide for himself and help his mother who did not have a job; an uncommon aspect of most 17-18-year old's lives, giving of their income to their parents. This was ingrained in all discussion surrounding money and the future; he would give back to his family, often singling out his mother. He respected his parents and knew they had their own challenges, yet they did not let those get in the way of providing opportunities for their children. It was important for him to show them the potential he had to finish college, not only for himself, and his future career and family, but to be able to give back to his parents. He always remembered the regret his father had of not getting an education when he was younger, and he did not want to live in the shadows of those regrets.

In understanding Finn's role in the family, I gained appreciation for how connected he was with his family. His family comes first and he often referred to time spent with family on weekends, holidays, and other celebrations. He spoke of his three-year old niece for whom he is the godfather. When I met with him he smiled and was proud as he told a story about how big she was getting and the new things she was doing.

At the in-person interview, he smiles and laughs when sharing stories of his family. He is almost giddy talking about them. This connection is an additional motivator for him to succeed in college and ultimately a career. Though in going to college he has become more independent from his family:

Like I don't rely on my parents anymore for clothes, shoes, school material and all that stuff, but absolutely that is where my parents would help me out. Like if I have to buy or want something like the pistol that I bought myself, my first car I bought myself, so mostly materialistic things that I want, I am money independent, so the things my parents would provide for me would be food or if I needed to go to the doctor.

This independence has forced some additional challenges in Finn's life, and will be discussed when introducing themes.

### **A Balancing Act**

Since beginning college in August 2016, Finn has had to overcome challenges as he transitioned to college. Finn brought a car to campus which has recently broken down and this has affected his ability to get off-campus. He is saving money to get his car fixed for next semester. He tried out for the football team, but did not make the team, though is planning to try out again next fall. He was upset by this because he was convinced he would make the team. In high school, he was the captain of his team and the number one receiver among the public schools in his district. Unfortunately, his coach got fired during his senior year and the football team did not complete their season. He lost much of his strength and conditioning and is currently working out daily to try out again fall 2017. In retelling details of this story, I could hear the frustration in his voice. He was upset about not making the football team, yet had a solution; train regularly to prepare himself to try out fall 2017. He looks to the future, hoping he will be given a second chance.

Finn is still transitioning to college life. He has met many friends in his residence hall from a variety of backgrounds and geographical locations, and created a League of

Legions gaming club with friends. Anyone on-campus can join this club, they just need a computer, and meet as a group once a week.

Academically, the workload and accountability are different than what he was used to in high school. In high school, teachers and his parents helped keep him on track with material:

The material is more fast paced and advanced and it takes getting used to... and all the assignments are due in a more fast pace...and it was weird in the beginning but I am getting better now.

Time management, classroom expectation, and keeping himself accountable have been his greatest struggle as a student. In college, it is on him to create a study schedule, attend class, and understand class content.

Finn is proud of his accomplishments and is aware of new challenges as he settles in this first year. He seems to be taking each day at a time. He does not get too stressed out about school work, finances, or transitions with his college experience, though recognizes when he needs to address these with more time and attention. For example, he thought he was doing well in a class until he got a test and an assignment back, so he now readjusts his time and attention for this specific class. When he recognizes he needs to purchase something, i.e., shoes, snacks, or car parts, he readjusts his budget. He does not want to pull from savings; this is a last resort. He checks how much he has left from the bi-monthly pay check he receives for working 10 hours a week at a campus dining hall and assesses accordingly. He does not display anxiety around these adjustments, he takes them as they come each day. When talking about them, his voice is not raised or

suggests worry; he speaks about these aspects of his life, just as he would detail about his diet or his story of using the pantry.

### **Identifying Food Insecurity**

I asked Finn if he had heard the term food insecurity, a term used in the consent form. He had not heard the term but thought it meant, "...not feeling secure that you have enough food for the day." In elaborating on this term, he did not identify with being food insecure because his family always had enough. But he stated:

Maybe at the beginning of the semester when I ran out of food for those few days...it kind of felt like it was going to be a rough day, because I have always had enough food...it just felt like, it felt weird.

Prior to hearing about the food pantry, he was struggling to have enough to eat for a few days, and was hungry. "I was running low on money or the dining hall was closed and there was nothing I could do about it." In hearing Finn state this I was torn because I felt, given what he said about his family's financial situation, they may have been stretched at times. After discussing his food experiences with him which appear later in this section, he stated he always had enough food growing up. Since this was his father's main priority for his family, I understand how Finn felt he always had enough.

As discussed in Chapter II, the AFSSM is one measure used to assess food security among adults and is part of the larger U.S. Household Food Security Module (Bickel et al., 2000). Indicators include if respondents can afford balanced meals, must cut the size of meals because of too little money for food, or have been hungry. When reviewing questions asked of the AFSSM, Finn answered four out of the 10 questions



positive for some aspect of food insecurity. Four out of 10 is labeled as low food security among adults for this given survey, and is defined as food insecurity (Bickel et. al, 2000).

In reviewing findings with Finn from the AFSSM, he identified he had worried whether food would run out before he got money to buy more based on when he got paid. Occasionally there were limited funds in his immediate checking account and he did not like to pull from savings. He believed the food he bought at times did not last and he did not have money to get more, and he identified with this because earlier in the semester he struggled with having adequate food supplies for a couple days. He also did not have immediate funds to buy more, nor transportation to get to the grocery store.

There have been times he could not afford to eat balanced meals, and he ate less than he felt he needed because there was not enough money for food. He could have balanced meals at the dining hall, though often filled in the third meal of the day, either breakfast, lunch, or dinner, with snacks. These snacks provided energy and fuel, though did not always feel balanced to him. They do not always provide foods from each food group, such as, protein, carbohydrates, fruits, vegetables, and dairy. He responded he never cut the sizes of his meals and he never was hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food. He eats less during snack times, then he would like, though never cuts the size of his meals from the dining hall.

He never lost weight or did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food. Even during the few days, he struggled with food access, he was still able to eat something from a friend on his residence hall floor. Though he felt not as full as he usually would after meals or snacks on these given days, he never got so hungry, he

felt like he was starving. Finn referred to this as his priority; to make sure he eats.

However, during the time before he knew the food pantry existed, he was less satisfied than usual.

All questions he identified with refer to instances, which may have occurred in the last 12 months, even if it was only a couple times (Bickel et al., 2000). In reflecting on these responses, Finn discussed how those statements he identified with mainly occurred during the time at the beginning of the semester, when he was running low on meals and did not have any food in his residence hall. He felt stuck and within a couple of days was informed of the campus food pantry. The pantry could fill in a gap.

Finn identifies with aspects of food insecurity; in particular, a few days at the beginning of the semester. Even though he has experienced reduced access and quality of food this past fall, he has begun using new strategies to ensure three meals a day. He did not identify as food insecure initially, because he did not know this term until it was presented to him. The time he identified with food insecurity occurred when he did not properly spread out his meal swipes. For a few days of the given week he had no meal swipes and had minimal food in his residence hall. He had not gone to the grocery store and had not gotten paid. After this instance, he was told about the campus food pantry and this resource has helped in times of need.

### **The Campus Food Pantry**

Finn has at most two meals a day from a campus dining hall, based on his current meal plan. Students are unable to take foods from these establishments, only from the grab and go dining services on campus where students may use dining dollars and not

meal swipes. As part of one of Finn's scholarships he does monthly check-ins with his advisor on campus. During one of these sessions, he was told about the campus food pantry. Finn uses the campus food pantry to help supplement his 14 meal swipes a week.

At the beginning of the semester, Finn used his meal swipes and he and his roommate went to the grocery store. They purchased items to supplement their meal plans. After this initial grocery visit, Finn had no additional food besides what was offered with the meal swipes:

So we had a little bit of food but we went through that real fast. So after the first couple weeks we didn't have time to go get groceries and then my car broke down and we couldn't get to the grocery store...so we never went back to the store.

He figured he would find a solution when he realized he was short on food. What this solution would be, he was unclear. In listening to him describe this process, I am struck with a sense of dependence on his parents to provide him with his basic needs prior to college. Food was always available, thus the thought of not having enough did not cross his mind. When confronted with this uncertainty, he realized he needed to figure out a solution.

In chatting with Finn about this occurring at the beginning of the semester, he refers to time being a factor, however it is more connected to convenience. It is much more convenient for him to utilize a resource on-campus, because it is right next door to his residence hall. He has time, but that would require planning errands into his schedule to go to the store, and now requires using public transportation. Finn tends to live in the moment, not planning too far ahead. Thus, convenience is crucial for him to access alternate food solutions.

**Initial visit to the food pantry.** Finn visited the food pantry the day after his advisor told him where it was and how it worked:

When I showed up [the student worker] just told me how it works and gave me a bag and told me I got two visits per week and um... he took me down to the pantry and showed me where everything is located and gave me an explanation of how everything works...I was the only one there that day. Once you are in the pantry, you have to check out the items so they know what you got.

Finn does provide detail in explaining his first visit to the pantry. Since he was my first interview, this was the first time I could visualize what an initial visit looked like for a participant. He provided information on how the pantry operated, while others provided more surrounding their interactions within the pantry. This is important to note because it drives meaning students give to using the campus food pantry. Initially, Finn stated he was nervous when visiting the pantry for the first time. However, now going to the pantry is something he does about every other week. He often has visited with another friend, who also uses the pantry.

**Items received from the food pantry.** Finn visited the food pantry four times during the fall semester. He uses the pantry to supplement his approximately \$30.00 a month budget for food and other essentials. At first, this seemed like he had not planned enough money into his budget for food. However, given the month and other expenses he had, this amount varies. Living in a residence hall, he has access to some toiletries, including toilet paper and paper towels. In using the food pantry and his campus meal plan, he has ensured himself three meal equivalents a day. He always can pull from his savings and utilize additional money from his job, though tries to save as much as he can from this source of income.

Some of the items he has received are peanut butter, ramen noodles, cereal, milk, peanuts, soup in a cup, granola bars, spaghetti noodles, pasta sauce, a soda, oatmeal, and a coffee maker with coffee. Finn sees many benefits to using the food pantry:

If I am ever running low on food meals, I don't have to use my savings to get food. Since they also have snacks I can go to the pantry instead of having to pay at the university center or other campus [food establishments].

He speaks of mainly using the pantry for snack items, such as granola bars, peanuts, and peanut butters. Ramen, cereal, oatmeal, and pasta help fill in for meals he chooses to not use a swipe. "One weekend I remember I ran out of swipes and I wanted to make a meal for a weekend so I got pasta...it lasted 2-3 meals." The peanut butter can be a good snack because it is a protein and fat, providing satiety. "Right now, I just eat it out of the jar...but I am hoping to get something I can put it on." Occasionally, the pantry will have items that are donated which are not food items. Finn happened to go to the pantry right after a coffeemaker was donated. There was also coffee he could choose to accompany the coffeemaker, but not cream or sugar.

### **Photo Elicitation: Searching for Routine**

Finn stated he took seven photographs with his camera phone. However, when asked to send me the photographs during the first three interviews none were received. During the in-person interview, it was requested the photographs be texted to me. He stated five of the photographs had gotten lost, when he had to switch phones recently because his phone plan was changed. He shared two photographs from his new phone which are captured in Appendix F.

For Finn, he had been wanting to buy a coffeemaker. The dining hall served coffee but, “most of the time I don’t get any in the dining hall due to my classes, because of this one class I am not able to go to breakfast.” On a recent trip to the food pantry, someone had donated a coffeemaker. “It felt great, the fact that they were giving it out for free...I know it is used, I don’t mind.” He also received coffee and now was able to make coffee in his residence hall prior to class.

In the photographs provided are a basic coffeemaker and a can of Kroger coffee. When discussing receiving the coffeemaker, he was so excited for this free find at the pantry. Instead of paying \$25.00 for a coffeemaker, he got it for free. He thought he was very lucky; he showed up at the pantry at the right time. The coffeemaker symbolized for Finn an opportunity to get back into a routine he had prior to coming to college.

Finn’s mom used to make coffee for him every morning the past couple years of high school. The biggest struggle with the new equipment was Finn’s mom had made the coffee and he served himself. “So this is my first year doing it by myself...I usually just put spoonfuls of coffee and then water in and hope it is good.” The coffee did not taste like what he had at home. This could have been due to the brand or because the ratio of ground coffee to water was not the way his mom prepared it for him. This example highlights an item Finn wanted but could live without for a time. This theme of needs versus wants is explored in the second part of this chapter.

He had enjoyed coffee prior to going to high school and this was something he had gotten used to over time as part of his morning routine. Thus, the timing of receiving

the coffeemaker was perfect; he did not need to spend any money on it, though would have benefited from a lesson from mom on how to make a proper cup.

We laughed together thinking about Finn in his residence hall making coffee. It was humbling because it showed how much his mom did for him at home. His mom had done many things around the house in her role within the family, which he now had to do for himself. These included making coffee in the morning, ensuring he had meals throughout the day at various times, laundry, and making all purchases for himself, including maintaining a budget. This can be part of the student experience and was influenced by Finn's financial independence and moving away from home.

### **Food Experiences and Health**

Finn grew up participating in the school breakfast and lunch program. This is a federally assisted meal program offered in K-12 schools and some child care settings. This program provides balanced meals at low or no cost to participants and meets certain nutrition requirements (USDA: FNS, 2016b). His mom would buy groceries and cook additional meals for the family. "My dad would give her money for groceries...because she didn't work. My dad's main priority was to feed us, so we always had food on the table." This would be a similar expectation for Finn as he begins his career. He believes his role is to provide for his future family.

**The influence of cooking.** Finn remembers his mom cooking meals such as pasta, soups, shrimp, different meat varieties, brown rice, salads, beans, and for weekend breakfast: eggs, toast, and cereal. His mom cooks many ethnic specialties for the family. "For example, we have tamales and posoles at Christmas. Like we have chicken, rice and

beans or tacos. Every meal we had was based on our culture.” His mom makes a spicy salsa that is, “really amazing...She puts tomato, peppers, water, sometimes, not always a garlic clove, a little bit of salt and blends it all together.” He smiles as he talks about the ingredients and the process his mom goes through when making it. When he went home for Thanksgiving, she made some for him to bring back to school. His tone provided excitement and his face lit up when talking about his mother’s cooking. This same enthusiasm was noted when recalling memories from playing football in high school.

His mom also was influential in teaching him how to cook. Around the age of 12, he became interested in learning how to cook and asked his mom to teach him:

So she has taught me to cook eggs, spaghetti, posole, Caldo de Siete Mares, and a soup called Camarones a la Diabla or “The Soup of the Seven Seas”, it is really good it is a soup made out of shrimp, octopus, and squid and other fish and...I learned how to make salsa and a dessert called flan ... that was a positive thing, I learned some cooking tips.

He sees this as a very useful skill, “that you need as an adult to survive. I thought I would use it in college, I was a little bit wrong.” Currently in his residence hall room he has the coffeemaker, a microwave, a mini fridge, and no pots or pans. There is a shared kitchen he can use but one must rent the cooking equipment from another building. “The only thing I have cooked was the pasta, I got everything from the pantry and I asked my RA [residence hall assistant] because she had a pot and other equipment.” When Finn describes this experience, it appears that accessing and preparing food needs to be convenient for him. He does not want to have to go out of his way or do more work.

**Total diet intake.** Finn’s usual food intake, focuses on getting foods from each food group, including carbohydrates, proteins, fruit, vegetables, and dairy. He pays



attention to proteins and carbohydrates for football, “but I pay attention to them all...usually I get an apple or watermelon or salad with my meal and I drink lots of milk, I eat cheese, I do yogurt sometimes.” He now works out in the morning so eats low fat and a few carbohydrates, while getting some vegetables and overall energy to maintain weight. Finn believes home cooked meals his mother makes are a healthier option than some of the foods cooked in the dining hall, where he usually gets a hot item or makes his own sandwich. He loves going home, because his mom will cook for him and he gets to bring leftovers back to campus, which usually lasts a few days.

### **Summary**

We reached our peak connection at the in-person interview. Because of finals and holiday break, between the in-person interview and the last interviews, momentum with him was lost. He did not respond to emails consistently and in the fifth and final interview, he stated he was in the middle of doing other things during our scheduled phone meeting. Finn provided some insight into details surrounding initial data analysis shared with him. After reaching out for an additional follow-up call to clarify content, it was clear he did not want to provide any more information. He did not respond several times, though I continued to reach out to him. The decision was made at this point, to stop trying to have additional interactions with Finn.

### **Zipporah**

Zipporah, 22, is a traditional student who is junior status. She was born in Ghana and moved to Massachusetts with her mother when she was nine years old. Her family currently resides in a large Western city. She is of African descent and her family

consists of her step dad, mom, half-sister, and brother who live at home. Her older sister and her brother are currently in college. Her mom and step-dad are both nurses, working in separate facilities.

Zipporah went to a public school and attended a university about four hours away from her hometown for two years before transferring to RMI. It had always been an expectation of hers to go to college as well as her parents, "...my parents made it known and I also wanted to go, to get a good career you need to go to college." Zipporah is majoring in history and would like to be a professor at a university eventually:

So I kind of want to do African studies or Asian studies. I see some similarities between these cultures and I want to explore it...I may get my masters, take a break and work and teach and then get my PhD.

Zipporah appears to be a very ambitious, young woman and is part of an exchange program spring 2017; a culture immersion to South Korea to gain perspective on another culture different than her own. This opportunity will allow her to begin understanding aspects of the Asian culture. She is excited about this trip and left at the beginning of March 2017 for this three-month immersion.

She chose RMI because it was closer to home than her previous school.

Transportation home was more accessible from RMI. RMI also had the current major she is pursuing. She has enjoyed her time at RMI and has found various ways to fit in and have social interactions with students who have common interests.

### **Engaging with Zipporah**

I conducted four interviews with Zipporah; three of the interviews were over the phone and one was conducted in-person. These interviews lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour

and 45 minutes. Zipporah took about 10 photographs, which are discussed in the next section. At first, Zipporah was difficult to understand on the phone because she spoke in a soft voice. She was also hard to get a hold of for interviews. After the initial interview, she shared many enlightening thoughts on her experiences as a student using the campus food pantry.

Zipporah was cheerful, detail-oriented, and grateful over the phone, always answering questions in a thoughtful and straightforward manner. I was intrigued by her discussion of the process of her experiences, especially how she prepares food. She provides vivid detail whether talking about obtaining additional financial aid, making a casserole, or events with organizations she is involved in on-campus. In telling stories, she allowed for insight into her world and understanding around what is important to her: education, cooking, being with others, and her family. After conducting two phone interviews, I interviewed Zipporah in person. We exchanged a friendly hug and she even commented on how much she liked my colorful bag used to carry paperwork.

During the in-person interview, dialogue flowed back and forth as if we had known each other for months. She was excited to share parts of her story and we lost track of time during this interview. I felt connected to her responses and remarks because they allowed me to understand her thought process, beliefs, and values. I feel like I could relate to her examples and the clarity she provided on her experiences. In engaging in our conversations, I often sat nodding my head thinking, “Yes I can see that happening.” She always provided an explanation or an example when clarifying meaning for me and this helped me see her point of view.

Our connection allowed us to create meaning surrounding concepts related to her experiences as a student using the campus food pantry. On the day we met, she wore a polo shirt with an *African Society* logo embroidered on it, a black skirt, and dangly brown earrings with a stencil of the word *Africa* carved into them. Her dark hair was short and curly and she had an infectious laugh and warm smile. She looked me right in the eye when she talked and listened intently to my responses and questions.

### **Financial Support for College**

Zipporah gets most of her funds to pay for college via financial aid loans, which she must pay back after college. One of her loans helps pay for housing, since she lives in a university-owned building adjacent to campus. She worked at an area grocery store over the summer but currently does not work outside of school. “Because I don’t have transportation and so it is really hard for me to get work outside of school. I would usually get work study, but this semester I did not get it.” This seemed concerning to me, because she is trying to finance her study abroad trip and other additional expenses. She had tried getting a job on-campus but had been unsuccessful. She secured a job for the spring semester, which did help provide funding for her study abroad trip.

Since arriving on campus fall 2015, she has received financial advice from the Office of Academic Support and Advising. This included more affordable housing options and alternatives which did not require her to enroll in a campus meal plan, “because the apartment I lived in had a meal plan, you had to get a meal plan...so I tried to get rid of [it].” She assumed she could eat for less on her own than without the meal plan. She described herself as frugal and tends to only go to the store when she runs out

of something she needs. With her current budget of approximately \$30.00 a month for food, she still would be well under the equivalent of the campus meal plan. However, her budget may not supply the amount or adequacy of food she may need. Since she is still in this current academic year, it is hard to say exactly how much has been spent on food since the beginning of fall.

The Office of Academic Support and Advising has also assisted with informing her about additional financial options, such as scholarships she has applied for and alternative aid packages, to assist her while enrolled in college:

Because I didn't really have a job and I was struggling financially and I didn't want to ask my mom because I felt bad because she had other things to do and I knew she would give me the things that I needed like money and stuff like that but I also wanted to be on my own if that makes sense. I wanted to take care of myself without having to put pressure on my mom or rely on my mom... I think I asked my mom for money like two years ago and that was when I was at my old school...I try to figure things out myself before I ask for help.

Zipporah remains financially independent and embraces this independence. This independence and high expectations for herself is part of what she believes being a college student means, as she prepares for her future career. She clings to this independence as a defining aspect of her current circumstances, yet is proud to be able to figure out meeting her own budgetary needs.

Zipporah speaks pointedly about how important this is to not ask for help from her family. In a very respectful and passionate manner she explains the importance of this to me at the in-person interview:

I am not the only child, they have other bills they have to pay and there are other things that happen and they have to use their money for something else. So it is kind of like cruel of me to still be asking them for money and that...I was never raised to ask for money, African children are not raised to say "give me money,

give me money, give me money” if push comes to shove and you can’t get the money then maybe, *maybe* [emphasis added], you may be like can I have a little bit.

Zipporah was adamant about not asking for help. I tried to get clarification on her financial situation, including if her parents would help her if she needed it. She got highly defensive, and I felt as if I had upset or offended her. I was surprised by how she responded but after hearing about the cultural aspect tied to her reasoning, I understood her point of view differently. She may be less inclined than other students to ask her parents for help, which clarified for me why she believed in financial independence as a college student; she saw this as the norm and not the exception.

### **A Balancing Act**

Zipporah has attended RMI since fall 2015. She lives with a male roommate with whom she went to high school. She does not own a car, thus walks about 25-30 minutes to class depending on the location of the classroom. She is on campus for most of her day; classes start at 9:00 a.m. and are usually not over until 3:00 p.m. “Sometimes I stay on campus and like either run errands or do homework or have a meeting or just hang out.” She often enjoys staying on-campus, instead of walking back and forth from her apartment. Once she gets home she is not inclined to go back to campus until the following day.

She is very active with African Students Collaboration, a pseudonym for RMI’s African student group. She attends weekly meetings, events, and recently participated in a cultural program featuring dance, music, poetry, a fashion show, and a celebration of African foods. She speaks enthusiastically about this group and their programming. She

devotes many hours outside of class to this group, meeting at least once a week and often more as an event draws near.

Recently the academic side has been challenging:

I am not getting the grades that I use to get...the material is not more difficult because I am a history student, the format is the same as I am used to but I don't know what is going on. I used to get A's...I am getting B's and I got a C on my midterm.

Zipporah states she does seek help from teachers throughout the semester. Even in speaking with me, she asks for clarification or an example to gain understanding in what I am asking of her. This technique allows her to understand content and align it with examples from her own world.

### **Identifying Food Insecurity**

I asked Zipporah if she had heard the term food insecurity. She indicated she had not, but defined it in her own words, "so I am guessing when you are not able to fend for yourself, food wise or nutrition wise. Some or most of the time you have a shortage...potentially have a shortage of food." She stated she has never felt this way when thinking about this term in relation to her current circumstances. She sees using the pantry as a resource, which assists in filling gaps in her diet with regards to snacks and meal components to pair with items she already has at her apartment.

In reviewing findings with Zipporah from the AFSSM, she did not identify with many of the questions it asks. For example, she did not worry about whether food would run out before she got money to buy more, and she thought she always had money to get more food. Even though her interview responses suggested otherwise, Zipporah thinks she can afford to eat balanced meals and did not feel she needed to cut the sizes of her

meals. She never ate less than she felt she needed or was never hungry and did not eat because there was not enough money for food, because she always had options in her pantry. She never did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food, because she always had snack options and usually leftovers to ensure she had at least one meal a day. She purposefully ensures she has enough non-perishable items, which would allow her to make a meal, even if it was not balanced. She never lost weight because there was not enough money for food, if anything she maintained her weight regularly. All questions referred to instances which may have occurred in the last 12 months (Bickel et al., 2000). She identifies as food secure given the questions provided in this survey.

In reflecting on these responses, she discussed how the statements she did not identify with were because she was resourceful and provided enough for herself to eat in each moment, even if she only ate once a day or variety lacked on a given day. She generally does not get hungry, even after several hours of not eating. She always has access to money though tries to remain frugal and live simply, using less than she may have to each month, to have more monies to subsidy other expenses. The only question in her case, which could be open to interpretation, is how she defines balanced meals. She sees balanced as intake she has over a given week. Some meals may not necessarily look or feel balanced, yet if over the course of the week she can include a variety of foods, she feels balanced.



## **The Campus Food Pantry**

Zipporah heard about the campus food pantry at the end of fall 2015 semester from an advisor in the Office of Student Support and Advising when adjusting financial support and housing options:

The other issue was the food thing so, since I was going to forego the meal plan...she told me about the [pantry] and to go over there because I didn't know about it before...they would have all the things I could use to make actual food.

Zipporah uses the campus food pantry to help supplement food items every week and her approximately \$30.00 food budget per month. Since she worked at an area grocery store during summer 2016, this semester she came to school with some non-perishable items:

So I was able to buy like rice, ramen noodles...coconut oil which I use to cook with, oatmeal...like that I brought to school and I go to the pantry and get things I don't have. Like I have spaghetti but I don't have spaghetti sauce.

In Zipporah's case, she does a good job of keeping a mental inventory of her pantry at her apartment so when she uses the pantry or even a grocery store she can maximize her options at home. This is unique to her situation. She is mindful when considering meal planning, because she enjoys cooking and realizes the importance of having a variety of options available for meals weekly. If she has spaghetti she knows she would like something to go with this dry pasta, so in scoping items in the pantry she knows spaghetti sauce will pair with the spaghetti she already has at home. She also recalls leftover vegetables, cheese, and some dried herbs in her refrigerator and pantry which will enhance this dish even more.

**Initial visit to the food pantry.** After hearing about the food pantry, she went over and signed up, "they had a bunch of things and I have been going ever since."

Originally, Zipporah was embarrassed because she felt she was the only student using this resource and others were worse off. She was embarrassed because she never used a resource such as the pantry before and it felt uncertain. However, she kept going back because of the kindness and support provided from the staff at the pantry and it truly helped add variety and depth to her food choices. Due to her financial situation, the pantry had to be an option she used consistently. Once she began to go regularly, she met others, seeing other students going through a similar situation put her at ease; using the pantry felt more normal and a regular part of her life.

**Subsequent visits to the food pantry.** She initially interacted with the pantry GA in charge of the pantry:

It was a very welcoming place...like I can go there and have conversation, because I know some people that work there and I like to do homework there. It is a nice place to go get food or hang out.

During the in-person interview, Zipporah was planning on going to the food pantry after our meeting. I asked if I could join her and she confirmed that was fine with her. Upon arriving at the pantry, it was apparent she knew both student workers at the front desk. She joked and laughed with them while sitting on the couch in the main room. She was slouched on the couch and her posture and discussion suggested exhaustion. She was commiserating with the student workers about the last week of the semester and impending week of finals. She knew she had many hours of studying ahead of her and just wanted to lounge on the couch. She knew the minute she got up and went home, she would have to begin focusing on next week.

I felt very comfortable and engaged in conversations with Zipporah and the two student workers about the end of the school year. I immediately understood the “welcoming” feel she described in the main room of the building housing the campus food pantry, where all students using the pantry would enter. No one questioned who I was or why I was there; I felt like one of the college students hanging out.

Zipporah selected 10 individual items on this visit, which took about 10 minutes. There were four other women in the pantry while we were there. They took their items and left while she was still deciphering between her choices. She did not talk during this time and I let her have her space. This displayed the meticulous nature Zipporah gives to thinking about food and food choices. She wants to ensure she has enough of the right items for her and takes time in thinking through her choices as she selects her 10 items for the week.

**Items received from the food pantry.** Zipporah visited the food pantry 13 times during the fall semester. She has even lent a hand to those working in the pantry, “one time I was there when they went and did the grocery shopping and I helped put everything away, so it is nice to interact with people and know I am “not in it alone.” Over the course of 13 weeks, she received cereal, milk, coconut milk, eggs, corn tomato sauce, popcorn, animal crackers, tuna, grilled chicken, frozen carrots, pork chops, Pringles, tortillas, onions, bananas, peppers, ground beef, salad dressing, lemon pepper seasoning, cheese, blueberries, and toiletries. Most of the time there is mixed variety of canned items, frozen items, toiletries, produce, meats, cheese, eggs, snack items, and condiments for students to choose from throughout the week.

Zipporah enjoys experimenting in her kitchen, thus spends time at the pantry thinking about items she could use in a dish. She is very process-oriented in describing items she makes at home using foods selected from the pantry. She provides detail and excitement:

When I went to the pantry last week they had these shell spaghetti and it was whole wheat and I had cream of mushroom a while ago and I wanted to make a casserole out of it but I was ...but sometimes I get inspiration and create things so I was like, last week Friday I got the shells and then I had meat already, so I cooked the meat, added vegetables that I had and then put the cream of mushroom that I had in there and I layered it and mixed it and put vegetables and cheese on it on it and baked it and then that is what I had.

All of the above items she received at some point from the pantry, except the vegetables.

While working at the area grocery store the previous summer, she received two gift cards of \$5.00 each as a thank you. She used these for vegetables to accompany this dish. In another example, Zipporah used her creativity to make a common breakfast item for lunch:

Today I had bread - I made French toast...they had this bread um, so delicious. I don't know where they got it but maybe someone donated it but it is like...I sliced it up and then the eggs I got from the pantry I kind of made French toast out of that.

Her voice was full of excitement in describing this dish. She could get several meals of French toast out of this one loaf.

### **Photo Elicitation: Convenience**

Zipporah took 10 photographs on the disposable camera. However, since she had not used this device before, only three images illustrated some of the items received from the pantry and prepared by Zipporah. The other seven images were completely too blurry

to identify. The other picture was taken by Zipporah using my camera phone when we visited the pantry together. See pictures in Appendix G.

Though Zipporah got meal supplement ingredients from the pantry, she also selected items for convenience. She liked to select crackers, popcorn, and granola bars to have for snacks. “I don’t always want to make a big meal so I go looking for cereal or milk, cheese or eggs or fruit...I could do cereal for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.” The first picture showed the snack items she received from the pantry. Though not the most satisfying of items at times, these provided something to graze on in the evening when she was studying. As well, cereal with milk was a quick and easy meal she could have in the evening with minimal preparation. These snacks symbolized common items she included as a college student in her diet and received from the campus food pantry.

The next photograph, was an off-centered picture of *Spam*. Once she took *Spam* to add to a stew and rice dish, noted in the third photograph. However, the flavor was teriyaki; not her tastiest dish. This photograph symbolized for Zipporah, the act of taking items from the pantry which she would use to supplement a meal with other ingredients she had at home. However, it also showed the trial and error which occurred in her culinary creations. This was due to having to choose options from the pantry which she may not have used in the past. Some dishes turn out great, such as the French toast and casserole, while others she had to force down.

This was the case with the stew and rice dish in the third picture. She had rice, spices, onion and celery yet wanted to add a meat product to this dish. The teriyaki *Spam* was the solution, though the flavor profile did not match what she intended for this dish.

She managed to eat the portion on the plate for dinner, though leftovers were thrown out later.

The last picture showed items which she received during the last week of school. Since she would be going home for part of the holiday break, she felt she needed some snack and toiletry items to get her through the exam week. She took most of the granola bars they had left on that Friday afternoon, which she stated would be good for late night studying. This picture illustrated her need for items offering convenience, at no cost. This picture highlighted how she used the pantry and her resourcefulness in planning her budget accordingly, while ensuring she has enough considering her financial challenges. If she had gone to a gas station or even a grocery store, these items would have cost around \$8.00-\$12.00, and the pantry was right on-campus.

### **Food Experiences and Health**

Growing up Zipporah would buy lunch at school and her mom would have dinner ready, "...there was plenty of food and stuff like that...but we really didn't eat together...we would do our homework and eat whenever." Most of the foods prepared were rice dishes, because this was an important ingredient in her culture. Her mom made ethnic specialties such as, Jollof rice, Waakye rice, and Kelewele, a fried plantain with seasoning. She also made included foods which were not of African origin including, spaghetti, lasagna, and mashed potatoes. For breakfast, her mom would make breakfast burritos they could grab on their way to school or on the weekends she made pancakes, "...she took care of us." In listening to her explain some of the dishes she prepared, I was intrigued by the process and detail she used in describing these experiences.

**The influence of cooking.** She has basic cooking equipment in her apartment, including a knife, pots, pans, a spoon, cups, plates, bowls, and some spices. Zipporah learned to cook from her mom, though this was also influenced by other family members, such as her aunt and grandmother:

I don't know where the cooking thing started, it was from my mom when I came here. When I was younger...I didn't really lift a finger to cook...um, so when I came here I started to cook.

Though she claims to not be as great a cook as her mother, she can think creatively when in the kitchen. "I think about things and how to make it and instead of looking online I use my imagination to see if I know how to make things." She likes to do trial and error when cooking, often making mistakes which turn out to be edible. She likes to create her own recipes, not use others.

Prior to moving to the U.S., Zipporah mainly ate Ghana food, "like stews, plantains, fruits, everything was freshly made...and when I came here my mom does a combination, she does African food and Asian food and American food." In describing this type of food, she attached positive feelings to these food memories, especially because now she does not have access to these foods in the U.S. There is an African specialty store she visits in her hometown, but it is expensive and they do not have everything. She recalls making Jollof rice, an African staple, when she was 16 years old:

There are things that I know how to make and, I am like, this is mine. And then there are things that I don't know how to make... and it was the first time I made Jollof on my own and I added a lot of water to it and it became very soggy and I think that is Nigerian Jollof or something. It tasted good but it was not the texture it was supposed to be ...I hated it and I didn't want to make anything after that. People complimented it like my step dad and I was made fun of because that is what we do and my mom and aunt were like "why?" and I was like because it was burning!

Though she was embarrassed when retelling this story, her reasoning allowed for clarity. Cooking is an important part of her culture and her experiences growing up. She takes great pride in her cooking and she received this from her mom. “My mom is a very adventurous person when it comes to cooking and she cooks a lot for other people. There is always food in the fridge so people can look through and decide what they want.” Her mom introduced her to cooking, though it is a skill which has been passed on from generations. She was taught cooking is a way to show you care and love for others. It is a way of giving something of yourself to others; I made this for you and expect nothing in return.

Though when cooking for others she still feels vulnerable:

When I cook, it may seem like I am good at it but in my head and my heart I think this sucks and at the end of the day they will let you know one way or another verbally or thru their body language, if your food was adequate or not...you are having people taste...I feel like your soul...you just don't cook you really need to think about it.

I enjoyed listening to her describe this aspect of cooking. Cooking is an art; an expression of one's self comes alive in dishes made with love, effort, and fresh ingredients. Vulnerability surrounding this skill allowed me to understand the importance of cooking in her life. She shares a part of herself every time she cooks for someone and in putting herself out there for others to critique her cooking, she feels vulnerable. Her mom can cook for others and make it appear seamless. She respects her mother and everything she has provided for her. She strives to be able to provide this same comfort and love, using her mom as an inspiration for the dishes she prepares.



She learned from the earlier experience of burning rice and has gained confidence in her cooking ability. Though she did not enjoy cooking growing up, it has become a way of living as she has transitioned to being on her own. She can stretch ingredients and utilize foods in uncommon ways to provide several meals for herself, which also freeze well.

Even with items she receives from the pantry, Zipporah finds a way to be creative and add flavor to these meals:

I didn't really appreciate...my mom's cooking until I had to do it on my own. She is not here to cook for me, and I love my mom's cooking...just making ramen, like cut onions and put stuff in there to make it your own is a process.

She honors the time and effort her mother put into making meals to fill the refrigerator, so family and friends were always nourished when entering their home. Her mom puts many hours into cooking, it is not quick nor simple, yet provides cultural inspirations. Zipporah respects her mother even more now that she must do the preparing on her own. Zipporah loves to spice up common dishes, thus ramen by itself will not do for her. By adding other ingredients, she can impart flavor and nutrition.

Her appreciation of food and flavors was further expressed when describing a program hosted by the African Students Collaboration on campus:

The program that I was in afterwards we had dinner for the people who came...a celebration of African stuff and afterwards we had food and I was really surprised because people loved the food because African food, is very, the texture is very different from American food, but people really loved it, people came back for more. We had so many people to the point that I thought it wasn't going to be enough for everyone. People kept talking about how good it was and tasty, just food alone allowed people to have conversation. And to sit and talk and all of that...it is a bridge to other cultures and a connection to memories and life.

When describing this on-campus event she is enthusiastic and her face lights up. I feel a similar enthusiasm because I teach a *Culture and Cuisine* course. Sharing food and flavors of different cultures is an experience. It is rewarding and inspirational to see students have ownership over something they prepare, while enjoying variations between culinary traditions. They are always so surprised at how flavorful the dishes are we make in class. Zipporah explained a similar experience when interacting with students who attended her student group event. She was excited their various cultures could intersect between a common staple: food.

**Total diet intake.** Zipporah doesn't get very hungry throughout the day, so she tends to not eat until mid-afternoon or later. She also must remind herself to eat:

I eat sometimes smaller amounts and other times...you know your eyes are bigger than our stomach. I used to have this bad habit in that whatever I grabbed and if I was full I had to finish it because I hate wasting food... if I do get hungry it goes away pretty fast, but I don't think about food a lot, sometimes if I crave things...I am going to have this breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks in between, I don't think like that...and sometimes I don't get hungry for the whole day and then I am like I need to eat.

Zipporah claims to be someone who can have one meal a day and be okay with the decision. She needs to prompt herself to eat and often this occurs after 4:00 p.m. and includes snacks later in the evening. I believe this to be true, though also sense that she grazes in the day on-campus without thinking about it.

For example, when we visited the campus food pantry together after the in-person interview, she took several pieces of candy from the candy bowl on the table. Thus, she may have been hungry, may not have eaten already that day, or was curbing her appetite. As well, she often meets a friend at her apartment between classes:

During the day I don't really think about food...Monday, Wednesday and Fridays my friend lives near campus and I would go there after my 2<sup>nd</sup> class and eat and then go back to class. I don't get hungry or even if I do it goes way real quick.

It may go away quickly, since her body is used to not eating much during the day, but it is not the most strategic of decisions.

Though she shifts most of her calories towards the end of the day, she does consider and believe the healthfulness of her choices is important:

It is good to eat healthy but because I don't have a job right now, I can't put a certain amount of money away to go buy fruits and veggies. So basically, what I have in my cabinet is [what I have gotten from the pantry] and those are things like I can eat...in a way, I still watch what I eat, I try to have like at least like carbohydrates...like I made a salad recently or I try to eat fruit, I try to eat healthy but my situation doesn't allow me to.

Depending on the time of month, she may not have as much variety as she would like so, she must prioritize her choices over the course of the week. For Zipporah being healthy and balanced include a variety of foods from each food group: carbohydrates, protein, fruits, vegetables, and some dairy. In the past when she lived at home, her diet included more variety and balanced meals throughout the day. Now given her financial independence, she has redefined her meal planning to include a variety of food choices over the course of the week, due to a limited opportunity for balanced meals daily.

### **Summary**

Zipporah is a very thankful person and always seems to be thinking of others. In all interactions with her, she seems to have genuine care and concern for what is going on in my life and is grateful when I ask about her life. I appreciated the thoughtfulness in Zipporah's responses and willingness to provide detail and always ask for examples to help

her clarify what I was asking. She became much easier to talk to after the initial interview and continued to provide input after reviewing initial data collection.

### **Agatha**

Agatha, 33 is a non-traditional student with junior status. She grew up in Florida and identifies as a first-generation Cuban American; her mom is from Cuba and father German American. She has four siblings and is the youngest by eight years. She grew up in a privileged family, attending an all-girls Catholic high school.

She attended Wellesley College in Massachusetts on a merit based scholarship she received her junior year of high school. She won a national speech and debate competition, which paid for college. Throughout high school she was active in debate and speech, competing in several competitions and winning many trophies, which she has in her garage. She was always noted for her strong writing skills in high school and even currently in her college academic classes. She also could portray her thoughts and emotions differently than the other participants, due to her experience with debate and speech in the past.

She is very proud of these accomplishments when speaking of them as part of her story. Her parents were so busy with work and their adult life, she was grateful she had found an activity, which kept her busy and she received praise for consistently. She mentioned but never elaborated on a woman who helped raise her, a nanny. This woman appeared to have a closer relationship to her than her parents. A full ride to a prestigious college seemed very important to her, but did not hold the same weight in her parent's eyes.

Her mom came from a wealthy Cuban family and came to the U.S. when the economy clasped in Cuba. Her dad came from a lower class and was also driven to change his life course by going to college and building a career:

So growing up I feel like these people who had me, just had me as an accessory. I was blessed because I was sent to good schools and had good teachers and nuns and there was an emotional component to that as well because they don't know who I am and I think it has manifested itself now.

In hearing her say these words, understanding around many of our conversations began to emerge. She never received what she needed most from her parents growing up: love, comfort, and attention. She received these in different ways from a cast of characters whose paths she crossed. She found comfort in her relationship with her husband and that too was quickly taken away from her. She has not had consistency in her life, thus strives to provide this for Noelle, her nine-year-old daughter.

At age 19 she had a stroke and, "...had to withdrawal from school, and give up my...merit based scholarship...and when I had my stroke I had to learn to walk and talk again which took like two years." She speaks about how she had to move on and gives a detailed description of how she met her husband at the age of 21:

...at the Home Depot and he took me out and we had some flaming cheese. So less than a year later we got married and moved across the country...there we went for a group interview at [a bank] and got the same job at different branches...he ended up becoming the bank manager and I worked with advisors. The company paid for our move and then when I was 28 and he was 31, he died.

Both she and her husband worked long hours, though made more than enough money to support their family. They enjoyed vacations together, access to a variety of food, and opportunities for Noelle. Her husband died in 2012 from cardio myopathy, a condition involving damage to the heart muscle making it difficult to pump blood throughout the

body (American Heart Association, 2017). In severe cases, a heart transplant is warranted. Agatha knew her husband did not eat the healthiest and needed to lose weight. He ate secondary to stress, by turning to food when he was anxious or upset, and did not exercise, which exacerbated his heart condition. He received a heart transplant, and died five days later from complications.

Agatha speaks of a special bond she had with her husband, “he was goofy and charmed everyone...a charismatic man”. They understood each other and had many quirky inside jokes lasting all the way to the grave:

We buried him by a tree...you know he used to sing me...’I like them peaches I want to shake your tree’...and I said ‘when I die I want to be buried under a tree, so, you can come shake my tree.’ And he was like ‘whoever dies first, we will do that.’ So every time we go and see him we go and shake his tree so he is buried under the first big tree over there [in the cemetery].

As she talked about her husband she was quiet, calm, and a little uncomfortable. Yet she told me, talking about him and sharing memories helps keep him alive for her and Noelle. She was worried her daughter would end up like her husband. Having the good qualities, was not what she was worried about, it was the heart condition and everything which intensified it, “she looks just like him and I am afraid she is going to have a poor relationship with food.” Thus, Agatha tries to fill this gap by being there for her daughter consistently, showing her love, and offering her balanced meals. Noelle is like her father, both in looks and mannerisms. Agatha lives with daily memories of her husband through her daughter, which is both comforting and emotionally difficult.

### **Engaging with Agatha**

I conducted six interviews with Agatha; five of the interviews were via Skype and one was conducted in-person. These interviews lasted one hour to 1 hour and 30 minutes. Agatha chose not to take photos during the data collection process. We discussed this several times and she was willing to send me some via email, but got embarrassed. A visual to her seemed to be a more permanent example of her situation, then having a conversation with me. Agatha was friendly and always provided a tremendous amount of detail. Her stories captured aspects of her experience as a student, single mom, friend, and widow. Often when we met she appeared tired and overworked from the many roles she played in her life. She always seemed to have the courage and motivation to continue to move forward, if not for herself, for Noelle.

When I met Agatha and Noelle at their condominium on a cold December evening, they welcomed me into their home with a cup of hot tea and dinner. Agatha was wearing a green hoodie, jeans, and tennis shoes with her long brown hair hanging down past her shoulders. Her daughter had just finished basketball practice, so was hungry. They had put up a Christmas tree and stockings, and we discussed what Christmas would look like on a strict budget.

Agatha had made spaghetti and poppy seed muffins for us to eat. We all sat at a blue round table with painted pictures and sayings Agatha and her daughter had made when they first moved into the condominium. This was the first piece of furniture they bought for their new place:

Because when my husband was around, we would eat lot of pizza pockets while watching *Law and Order* [in front of the t.v.]. And I thought, I don't want to lose my kids childhood to the t.v. and we actually did not own a table and we were married for seven years.

In listening to Agatha describe Noelle and her decorating this table and making it a new way to approach eating and being together, I began to get a sense of the special bond which she had created between her and Noelle. This was further illustrated in a photo album Noelle showed me of pictures from 2012-2013, the year after her father and Agatha's husband passed away. The photo album captured their new "normal"; a mother-daughter duo camping, visiting memorable spots across the country, and just being with each other. Agatha was always easy to talk to and our dialogue captures understanding via laughs, a few tears, and at times much needed silence.

### **Going Back to College**

In 2012, Agatha was a widow without a college degree and prior to this she had been working long hours and days, while her daughter attended day care. "But I couldn't work...and expect to work the same number of hours I had and be a mom for my daughter and I don't have any family to speak of or anyone to help with financially." She decided to go back to school and become a student:

It has been humbling because I have always had alot of class and wealth in order to navigate in this world and...my mom, she worked all the time and made six figures by herself and...my dad um...lived very impoverished and was the first to go to college, so my parents came from terrible circumstances and made six figures each and I was the fifth kid...I had everything.

In making the decision to go back to school, she had encountered financial challenges and additional stresses she never had before, because previously when she attended school she had the benefits of class and wealth.



She knew she had to find a career which could work with Noelle and her lifestyle. She was currently majoring in history with education and teaching, “this isn’t my first career choice...I looked for something, I could be there for my daughter, be there for breakfast.” She had applied for scholarships and her education was funded. “I have a 4.0, that is an expectation of myself and it is what you can bring to the table and this has happened to me and I can still make a 4.0.” Eventually, she would like to get her master’s degree, to provide even more for her family.

### **A Balancing Act**

Agatha has attended RMI since fall 2015. She lives about five miles from campus and Noelle attends a Catholic grade school about two minutes from their condominium. She owns a car she uses for transportation to campus, drops off and picks up her daughter from school, and run their weekly errands. She also volunteers at her daughter’s school, is a nanny for various families during the school year and summer, and takes photographs for others’ special events, while maneuvering around Noelle and her class schedule. Her daughter plays, “...volleyball, basketball, saxophone and did some plays the last few years.” During this visit, I had the pleasure of hearing one of her daughter’s songs played on the saxophone; an excited nine-year-old showing off her new skills.

Agatha tries to maintain a level of normalcy with her daughter to ensure she does not feel different:

I try not to let her know how different things are...all of her friends are active and do plays and sports and play instruments and I try to surround her with people that are doing well and families that are doing well and pretend that things are normal...I can’t have a big pity party for us...we have to move on with life.

Agatha is trying to create a portal for her daughter into what she experienced as a child, not the negative memories, but the positive aspects of living in a privileged household. She could do any activities she wanted and her family traveled, and she experienced abundance both at home and at friend's houses. This was her one-dimensional view of the world, which began to change as she realized priceless aspects of her life which were missing: love, attention, and comfort.

Between working, volunteering, ensuring her daughter is taken care of, and going to school full-time, no wonder Agatha appears drained during this visit with her. The night I visited she had a paper due at midnight and would finish it after Noelle went to bed; she was also up until 3:00 a.m. the night before, finishing up end of the semester assignments. "I am not 16 anymore, it is hard to stay up until midnight." I agreed with her because as a doctoral student working full-time in her 30s, I often feel the same way. Once my son is in bed, I finally have time to work on writing and editing and this usually can only last until 10:00 p.m.

### **Identifying Food Insecurity**

Agatha and I talked about what food insecurity meant to her during our interviews. She had mentioned being impoverished and poor, implying she may have heard the term food insecurity. She acknowledged her mom did not recognize she was impoverished. "My mom called me a couple months ago, and asked me if I wanted to go to the Canary Islands...and I am like mom...I have mustard in my fridge, I can't go to the Canary Islands with you." Agatha always has access to food, it is the quality and adequacy of the food she gets concerned about at times, "...I think...to be food insecure I

am always worried about where I am going to get the calories and the nutrients and I know the result of not having those”. Agatha knows when her body needs food and energy. She feels inadequate when she is unable to have a variety of food choices which provide the nutrition Noelle and her need.

In reviewing questions asked of the AFSSM with Agatha, she answered four out of the 10 questions positive for some aspect of food insecurity. Four out of 10 is labeled as low food security among adults for this given survey (Bickel et. al, 2000). In Agatha’s situation, within the last 12 months, the questions she responded to positively happened several times.

In reviewing findings with Agatha from the AFSSM, she identified she worried whether food would run out before she got money to buy more, because she always worries about money even if she knows it will all work out. She cuts the sizes of her meals and even eats less than she feels she needs to, because there has not been enough money for food. She often must cut the size of her meals, though rarely sacrifices Noelle’s portion. This a common occurrence, food intake of the parent or adult is reduced, to spare the child the experience of hunger (Bickel et al., 2000). She eats less than she should, even though she knows they will not run out of food, because she wants to make sure there is enough for Noelle. Many times, she has been hungry but did not eat because there was not enough money for food. The time of month factors into the amount she has left over for food expenses and if she feels they have enough to last.

She responded she never felt she did not have money to get more food and she could not afford to eat balanced meals. She always makes sure they have enough money for food, even if money is tight at times:

I plan money accordingly so it doesn't run out...I would probably be more luxurious if it was just me. As a student mom, I spend a lot of time doing brown rice and quinoa and the barley and oats and doing things with peanut butter to make it last.

She also ensures meals are balanced. Balanced to her is including all key nutrients: offering a protein, carbohydrate, and fat. The items may not naturally go together, such as peanut butter and rice, but all nutrients are presented at one time.

She has never lost weight because there was not enough money for food, and even gained a few pounds. This is probably due to grazing throughout the day, instead of focusing on meals. As well, her body is holding on to more energy because she is sporadic with her intake depending on the time of the week or month. She could never not eat for a whole day and even if she felt like she did not have money or food to eat, she states, "I would go to [grocery store] and steal a cookie...I would scavenge for it." She is resourceful and always ensures she eats something throughout the day. She has too many responsibilities and needs fuel to keep going.

### **The Campus Food Pantry**

Agatha heard about the campus food pantry spring 2016 at an orientation, but had to do a little digging to confirm logistics and location. She started using the pantry this semester. After locating where the pantry was on campus she began receiving 10 items once a week rather than five items twice a week. "And every time I go I say, I am here for my ten items...I am a single mom and I don't have the luxury to come here twice a

week.” When initially, talking about the way she uses the pantry, I thought it was unique to her situation. However, after talking to the pantry GA many students came once a week and take 10 items each time instead of five items two times a week.

**Initial usage of the food pantry.** Agatha uses the campus food pantry to help supplement her \$100.00 a month food budget:

I got to eat and that is why I go, you know everything in my body tells me...don't be that kid that is going to that pantry, because I grew up with abundance and I have to be like ok here is my food budget. And I can't go over this because there is no more money coming in and I am like great.

Agatha has even taken her daughter to the pantry with her. She believes it is something she does not need to be hiding from her, "...my mom hid a lot of things from me growing up and I didn't want to do that." She wants her daughter to be part of the process, realizing it will not be like this forever.

**Items received from the food pantry.** Agatha visited the food pantry 13 times during the fall semester. Some of the items she has received are potatoes, ravioli, mixed vegetables, soups, oats, peanut butter, cereal, muffin mixes, crackers, rice, mac 'n cheese, canned meat, canned fruit, rice, beans, trail mix, paper towels, shampoo, conditioner, pasta sauce, taco shells, pudding, bread, frozen pizza, fruit snacks, animal crackers, and quinoa.

One time, I got pizza and my kid was like so excited about the frozen pizza...So when you cook it in the microwave it is like hot on the outside and cold in the middle and I like super hate this but she is like "can I have more pizza" and I am like no, that was a one-time luxury, a treat you know.

Frozen pizza is not the most nutritious option for her daughter, but she does like to offer versions of comfort food so Noelle does not feel like she is missing out on foods her friends are offered.

Agatha does not enjoy cooking, it is more of a burden even if she has the ingredients to cook the meal. It is the time and energy that is tasking on her. She is creative in the combinations she provided, but on top of her already busy schedule, it is hard to be a single parent. However, she made quick and easy meals using items received from the pantry and her weekly grocery budget.

For Thanksgiving, she visited with four different families she is friends with in the area. She was grateful for all the invites, but felt expected to bring something. For one family, she made bread from a package she had received from the pantry. For another meal, she received a recipe from a friend, which contained potatoes, beans, vegetables, and bread. It is all cooked together in one pot, "...it is not the worst thing I have ever had." She tries to incorporate variety in Noelle's diet, but this requires time and energy. With this dish, the fact it was edible and easy to prepare, was a "win" in Agatha's book.

### **Photo Elicitation: Whenever I Can**

Agatha and I had discussions during each interview about taking photographs and how this visual method could further enhance the conversation we were having weekly. Since she was detailed-oriented, photographs could capture her words visually. She expressed her thoughts best via writing, but a visual seemed more permanent to her.

Given the detail and authenticity which her journaling provided, I understood how she felt more comfortable expressing herself through writing. She had used this in the past, to organize thoughts and tell her story and she stated she rarely shared parts of this with others. In reading her journaling over and over, I was struck with the visual it created in my head. I began to understand how difficult it was for her to take photographs of aspects of her life she described within these words on paper. The image of the “mustard in the fridge,” I could not get out of my head when talking with her. This was the one visual she stated she captured but never had the courage to show me. This image for her illustrated ‘whenever I can.’ She tried to provide healthy options whenever she could for Noelle and herself.

For example, depending on the time of month and what was left in her budget, healthier options may be limited. She tried to eat healthy, ‘whenever I can.’

The "whenever I can" is what bothers me. Tonight I took a picture of my fridge, but then was afraid to send it as it told more of a story that I was willing to admit. It's one thing to say you have mustard in your fridge, it's another to *have* mustard in your fridge. Needless to say, I didn't send it.

At the time of this journal reflection, Agatha began sharing information which allowed me clearer insight into her world. She was worried about what others would think if they looked in her wallet, fridge, and kitchen and saw the truth. I never saw a picture of the mustard in the fridge, but when I visited her I could not help looking at the fridge and imagining mustard on the middle shelf with nothing else around it. The loneliness and emptiness this indicated gave new meaning to the world in which she currently lived and the food experiences being created.

Though there is no photograph image of this, I believe it is important to note how this thought and her words capture an empty feeling. She had financial challenges and had to strategize her budget priorities daily; consistently struggling to provide enough for her and Noelle. For me, the mustard in the fridge captured all of this in one mental snapshot. Though at times she had more than mustard in her fridge, it felt to her like this was all she had in her life. This part was hidden behind a door that no one could see except herself.

There was a statement I have recently heard, which highlighted what is captured in this mental image. “We all have a story, it is just not the story we are telling the world.” (O’Leary, 2017). The mustard in the fridge symbolized this for Agatha. She could showcase a plethora of food around her house, instead of putting items in cabinets, to show others and Noelle they had plenty. She was involved and present in Noelle’s life and school to show her and others, she was available and managed to “do it all.” She could be a parent to a Noelle, a student, a volunteer, a friend, and an employee. She assisted her friends, so she did not feel so bad about being offered to stay for dinner or have her and Noelle over for the holidays. But they were willing to open doors and provided her with a warm meal, because she was so helpful and giving. However, the flame which provided this warm, energetic, and giving spirit was extinguished behind closed doors and the real, authentic Agatha came out. Just like the mustard behind the refrigerator door, she lived feeling lonely, empty, afraid, and uncertain of what was to come.



### **Food Experiences and Health**

Growing up Agatha consistently stated how she was privileged and always had enough. “My mother and father strove for abundance at the expense of not being there for me, but I never went to bed hungry.” In the 1980s, their food budget was around \$1,000.00 for a family of five, “...my dad used to let me “help” bring the groceries in by giving me the important responsibility of bringing in the eggs and not dropping them...I remember being proud of myself for getting them safely to the house.” They had two pantries and three freezers, in addition to a refrigerator and freezer in their kitchen. “You know when you have tons of clothes but nothing to wear... that was how it was...It was obnoxious the amount of food we had.” She did not realize how abundant her food choices were because she also grew up in a prestigious neighborhood. The realization of the life she lived versus the life she currently lives are in stark contrast. Her current food choices are not abundant, yet restricted at times.

**Family and peer influence.** Her parents both worked many hours a day. Her mom, “She worked 80 hours a week and made tons of money...she worked all the time,” and every night she recalls eating dinner at 10:00 p.m. Dinner consisted of yellow rice, pork, steak or chicken, and possibly vegetables. She did not recall anyone offering her anything, “green or any fruit growing up.” I had a hard time understanding this happening, yet given the information she shared about her parents it made sense. I felt sorry for her childhood experiences. In subsequent conversations, I applauded her for recognizing the importance of including fruits and vegetables in Noelle’s diet now, and

realizing the significance of this simple act: an opportunity to make a lifetime of varied health-conscious choices.

She talks to her mom every few weeks, though there is an obvious disconnect between what she needs from her mom and what her mom provides for her. Recently her mom and dad, who currently live in Florida, visited her and her daughter. During our skype interview, she holds up a yellow package of *President's* brand brie cheese. We both laugh, though our equally cognizant of the irony in this circumstance:

She bought me this big thing of brie and this like dark chocolate covered pretzels and this bruschetta and you know...biscottis. These upperclass foods, high end stuff...things she thinks I should have in my fridge. And though I was appreciative of these foods that she bought these are not the types of food that my daughter and I eat everyday...it is edible but it is not what we want to eat every day, when we are hungry... My mom...likes to show you that she loves you like here is this brie...it is nice but it doesn't make me feel better about the mustard in my fridge. It makes me feel worse.

Her mother does not seem to understand and responds to her current situation the way she would like to, not the way Agatha needs her to; though Agatha is not surprised by her mom's actions. Even though she appreciates what her mom brings when she visits and the amount can provide variety and some sustenance for a couple weeks, it feels luxurious and is so sporadic. Her mom and her abundance is here one day and gone the next and there is still just mustard in her fridge. She is left feeling empty on many levels.

Not only was there a negative, almost non-existent maternal influence at home, she also interacted with girls at school who offered additional challenges to her relationships with food. Many of her peers in high school experimented with disordered eating behaviors. She recalled specifically being asked if she wanted to be an anorexic or bulimic, "and this is the way you pick your friends and I came to find out most of the

girls there had an eating disorder, one of my friends like ended up in the hospital and almost died.”

Though Agatha had considered these behaviors, they never became part of her daily routine. She knew this was not a good way of living and used her strengths in debate to provide understanding surrounding the issue of eating disorders:

So my junior year I was part of the debate club and there was this thing called dramatic interpretation...no props, so you become the person, because you change your voice, your stance, etc...so it was a play I did called *The Orange*...and I hate oranges and I did not eat for three days so I knew what this girl was going through. So by like three days I was like this orange is going to taste the best. In doing this piece which I won...I realized, not eating is not for me and throwing up is not for me.

This piece illustrated what an anorexic would experience when living a life of starvation and a constant nagging of hunger. While Agatha described this experience, I was struck by the courage and determination she displayed. She did not have parental role models, nor the most supportive friends. She did have teachers who saw her potential and a nanny who cared for her. She was mature and could see through the haze which can be created by peer pressure at such a turbulent adolescent time of growth and development. Her sense of independence and following what she believed allowed her to take some of her new daily challenges in stride.

**Total diet intake.** Agatha must think about meals and snacks she provides Noelle and herself each day. For breakfast, the goal is to get something in Noelle’s body, “...because she can’t skip breakfast...and sometimes cereal, goldfish, eggs or whatever.” Agatha may have a packet of raisins, dried cereal, or chips. For Noelle’s lunch, proteins vary depending on the time of month; tuna fish, deli meat, or peanut butter. She has

lunch once a week with her daughter, "...and I try to make it seem like she has the best lunch ever." She wanted to provide a "normal predictable lunch" like all the other children were having, but sometimes she is provided with what they have:

For example, today...she had a bunch of Ritz crackers, so I put butter on them...that was like her sandwich and sometimes I get a Tupperware thing and put what we had for dinner last night in that...and she is like "they are leftovers..."and I am like" it is food. And so... I send her to school with a butter sandwich which does not make me happy as a mom.

For lunch, Agatha eats whatever is left over for the week or if she happens to be at a friend's house she may eat there, "...like today [my friend] made me a smoothie and a bagel and...I appreciate that." Dinners are usually simple and cooked using her one pot, stove, two skillet, and occasionally the microwave.

Though Agatha does not enjoy cooking, her daughter seems to like planning meals and prepping food items for her:

She loves to cook and will make a list with a menu and I pick items...I got her these piping things with cupcakes. I think it is ironic, the thing I struggle with the most she wants to be a chef. How does that work out...she always thinks about what she can mix with what and her dad was a good cook. And I am like wow you have a skill that I don't have.

Her daughter loves to make special menu items with a secret ingredient, "...because I showed her that once...she gave me skittles on Mac 'n cheese!" We both laughed together as mothers of young children, at this combination, but realize the opportunity it allowed for Noelle to be creative and show off her personality.

**Meal planning.** Since Agatha doesn't enjoy cooking, she does have to plan options, which require less cooking or preparation time. This can be a struggle because it

limits her choices. She ends up at a friend's house often or creating repetitious meals for her family:

She [friend] has things over there that are healthy and I know it sounds silly and strategic but...God I don't even know how to cook something healthy, like I have a zucchini, like we grow zucchini and I have veggies but I don't know how to make them taste good because no one did that for me as a kid...so I can cook rice and make an egg and peanut butter sandwich yea things that are healthier than eating a bag of Doritos, but at the same time I don't know how to make a meal that I can do in the small time I have and I am a single mom and I have everything else to do and cooking a meal seems like alot of time.

In listening to her talk about her cooking ability and lack of healthy choices at times, her frustration was apparent. I did offer some suggestions, yet she also overcompensates for the lack of choices and culinary expertise in other parts of her life. This includes being an engaged student, an involved mother at Noelle's school, and a helpful neighbor. In giving so much of herself, she often does not have additional energy to think about what to put on the table; she must force herself some days and thus choices and food combinations suffer.

### **Summary**

Agatha and I had a wonderful flow to our conversations. In the initial 10 minutes of the interview, it would be a "firehose" of information and then she would slow down and focus on the questions and prompts I had each week. I could relate to her the most as a mother, and a child and teenager who attended a all-girls Catholic school. At times, I reflected in my journaling that "I completely understand what she is saying, even though to her it seems crazy to say out loud." I felt like she opened up to me about emotional and vulnerable parts of her story and I respected and affirmed her sharing of these thoughts each time she chose to disclose more with me. I felt sorry for her at times and

felt a sense of loneliness lingering in her life. As we began to talk week after week, I looked forward to our conversations and she was always ready at our designated time and willing to share. I also got the sense she looked forward to talking to me each week.

### **Section Summary**

Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha shared stories and experiences about their upbringing, family, using the campus food pantry, their total diet intake, their current financial challenges, and being a college student. Each provided information about the complex relationships they have with food security, nutrition, and family life. In the second part of this chapter, I introduce themes developed during data analysis. Parts of their profile will overlap into theme development, providing enhanced understanding of their experiences with food insecurity and using the campus food pantry.

### **Theme Development**

Themes developed during data analysis included a) financial challenge identification; b) strategizing budget priorities; c) prioritizing health; d) food pantry uses and strategies; and e) having enough. For example, participants have financial challenges which have food and non-food related implications. Financial challenges when accessing food requires Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha to strategize their budget priorities when assessing their finances and making purchasing decisions. They encounter barriers to accessing food at times, though all consider the healthfulness of their food options in relation to meeting specific needs. This included how and what resources they utilize. Resources included the campus food pantry, area grocery stores, and other retail outlets. When utilizing resources, they reflected on having enough. They often negotiated

between essential items they needed, and desired items they wanted. The food pantry filled a void for all participants ensuring they had items which provided enough.

### **Financial Challenge Identification**

As the participants began to identify and explore their financial challenges, they realized the importance of establishing and maintaining a budget. Students face many challenges including weighing options to best meet their needs and allowing for any desirable items to fit within their budget. For Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha, financial challenges described were apparent and all were on a strict budget. Their budget required them to determine priorities by assessing greatest needs and rearranging finances to meet those needs first. In each of the participants' experiences, there was strategy and intentionality used in this decision-making process.

Participants spoke at each interview of having to budget themselves with regards to food and other essentials in varying capacities. They all know their own budget for items, though it is organized differently. Zipporah implied, "I have a budget when I go everywhere, [pointing to her head]." In limiting herself to approximately \$30.00 food budget a month, choices were restricted depending on the time of the month and other normal day-to-day expenses which accrued, challenging access to food. Her budget surprised me, though when asked more specifics about her monthly expenses she claimed to go to the store when she needed something, which was often only once a month. She had brought many non-perishable items to school, due to working at the grocery store over the summer, often received toiletries from the pantry, and only ate one meal and snacks on any given day.

Zipporah had to begin thinking about finances more since beginning college.

Zipporah reported thinking about finances 70-80 percent of the time:

Especially, when I was trying to do the study abroad program and thought about finances and stuff a lot .... and during financial aid times and filling out scholarships, it was like a year-round thing and now I am trying to buy a car and um... and transport myself home and get a job and all of that, so I have been thinking about finances a lot.

She seemed to have a lot of financial burdens which were tasking on her spending and purchasing decisions. This stressed her out and particularly concerned her due to the upcoming study abroad program. Though she had wanted this financial independence; she had specifically not asked her mom for money in over two years.

She aligned the college experience with an opportunity to rely on others and to figure out how to take care of herself. She realized no one was going to do this for her, thus she had to take accountability for her own actions and expenses. There were consequences because she felt like she always had to be looking for a job, additional scholarships, or aid packages to assist with housing, transportation, books, food, and essentials. A significant amount of her time was consumed by this and thus she could not focus on her academics or other obligations fully throughout the semester. She was aware that in her culture, the expectation was not to ask for money, though she knew her mom would provide what she might need financially if struggling during the semester. Zipporah had found new opportunities for social interactions via the African Students Collaboration group and the campus food pantry. Both organizations on campus provided support and distractions as she dealt with implications of new financial challenges.



Finn wanted to establish as much financial independence from his parents as he could. It helped his on-campus meal plan, housing, and tuition were all paid for the 2016-2017 academic year. His food budget of approximately \$30.00 a month, allowed him no reliance on his parents, and he had specifically asked for the space to have more independence upon leaving home and attending college. Separation from his parents came with consequences because he now had to rearrange priorities to have enough money each month for essentials; a decision Finn made as he transitioned to a different chapter in his life. He knew his parents would help if he really did need assistance, though consciously did not concern them with any of his financial burdens.

With this new independence, he had to use money from his job or savings for other miscellaneous expenses. "...Most of the money I am saving to finish my car and then usually what I have left is for some groceries." His car had broken down unexpectedly during the fall semester. He was saving money to pay for parts once his dad could tow it back to Denver and work on it himself. His dad could do the labor himself, which would be less expensive for Finn.

Agatha's financial challenges were uniquely different from Finn's and Zipporah's due to meeting additional criteria for non-traditional students; she had a dependent child, was a single parent, and had delayed postsecondary enrollment; she was now going back to school after not finishing a degree in her early twenties. This also included living further away from campus and increased the need for consistent transportation. Her food budget was \$100.00 a month, yet she also had additional expenses Finn and Zipporah do not have, such as Noelle's school tuition, an additional mouth to feed, and clothes for

two. Though it appeared Agatha's parents could be of financial assistance to her, this was not something she entertained.

She embraced her current situation as a single mom and widow, knowing she has attempted to create a better life for herself and her daughter. Her choice to quit her high paying job to be a more consistent role model and mother to her daughter was difficult on many levels.

If I was working all the time, like when your dad was here. I worked 7:00a.m.-7:00p.m, 6 days a week and made a ton of money. But who would be seeing you...day care and I don't want day care to raise you. So these are some of the sacrifices we have to make and things we have to do.

She was making sacrifices related to food access, but also related to vacations, activities with school-age friends, and current technologies. This was difficult for her daughter to process, though she did her best to provide understanding surrounding the daily choices they must make.

In providing perspective, Agatha appreciated and accepted this way of living as crucial to providing a lifestyle and mindset varying from how Agatha grew up. She had lived with abundance at the cost of loving, consistent relationships and the former was more important to her than having a full refrigerator or numerous gifts under the Christmas tree. It was hard daily to face reality, though when weighing the alternative, she knew she was doing the right thing for her daughter.

### **Implications of Financial Challenges**

There are implications to the financial challenges Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha encounter. These include social and physical implications that impeded opportunities for self-care, being with others, and having space in the day to think about academics and

activities of daily living. Each participant managed their financial challenges differently. A sample of their experiences is provided to capture variations surrounding the implications of their financial situations.

**Social implications.** Social outings or self-care considerations which would resonate as part of the HEI experience were often negotiated, depending on participants' budgetary needs. All participants enjoyed socializing with others as part of their college experience. These interactions allowed them to have social support among peers and an opportunity to unwind from day-to-day stresses of their lives.

Finn stated, "...Well when usually I want to go for a friend's birthday I have gone into a little bit of savings." Money, that may have been used for an essential item was justified to be used for a fun evening with friends. For a first-year student living on campus this is an important part of the HEI experience and he found space in his budget if he planned accordingly. Other times he opted to stay in his residence hall and play video games with friends on his floor rather than go out. Finn had formed new relationships with students living on his residence hall floor and in the League of Legions gaming club.

Zipporah's financial situation also impeded her social life. Zipporah seemed to be fine with staying at her apartment, getting homework done and working on financial aid applications, though she wished she had more flexibility in meeting up with friends and socializing off campus:

I just can't really go out. I am 22 and even to go to a bar, though I don't drink a lot, I would like to go to a bar and have a martini because I have never tried a martini and I would like to do that. I would like to go someplace with my friends but because of money I don't really do that and stay within my limits.

These implications influence what she believed her college experience should be, and she felt she must set boundaries, often saying “no” when she would like to meet up with others. She did not want others to pay her way. “Because even if I want to hang out with them or they invite me, I am like no I cannot go ...I don’t want to go there and you pay for my meal.” To Zipporah, this felt like she was being a burden to her friends and she did not want to feel like a “charity case.”

When considering social situations, it was easier for Zipporah not to go, “I am like I might as well stay in my room or house and chill by myself. I don’t have to go out and have fun.” We both laughed together when she stated this, because she would love to have fun and socialize. However, she also realized she needed to be strategic about what fits into her budget. This can be difficult at times, because she felt like she must say “no” more than she would like to:

Even though I like to be by myself, I like to be around people, so I am 22 so not being able to go out for a drink...and chill and talk and stuff. It is kind of weird and you really can’t watch people eat, ... like I am not going to eat but I will go with you. It has happened a couple of times and it is *really* [emphasis added] awkward, because I kind of want to eat. I am hungry but no...even if you don’t want to eat, seeing people eat..., it is weird so you feel like you can’t be in their presence. It is bummer sometimes.

It was a challenge for Zipporah to balance all aspects of the college experience. At times, the one thing that helped, socializing and being with others, was often jeopardized.

Agatha’s socializing was often with neighbors, mothers of Noelle’s friends, and her own mom peer group. Socializing with her peers, allowed her to be with other adults and not just interact with her daughter. Agatha needed to be strategic when providing her daughter with a sense of normalcy in her social life and interactions. As a nine-year-old,

she had age-appropriate needs and wants, such as hanging out with friends and being involved in school activities. She was often invited to girlfriends' houses and wanted to reciprocate and invite friends over:

She wants to have girl friends over from her school that are good kids and everything, but I think, do we have food in our house, can I invite them in...and so even though I do let her have friends over I always time it, the weekend we go grocery shopping at the beginning of the month. And then I am like, you can't go in the kitchen it is a mess in there, even though it is sparkling. And I am like, I will get you something...peanut butter on toast, because I don't want them going through my fridge and making my daughter feel less than, because she doesn't have what they have in their fridge.

Agatha was filled with shame surrounding what others thought of her current situation. It did not matter if "others" were her daughter's or her own peers. She hid certain aspects from others to provide an adequate life for Noelle, so she did not feel so bad about their situation in relation to other families with whom Noelle goes to school.

She also felt that she must plan ahead when her daughter gets invited to other events, such as a birthday party, which may require bringing a treat or a gift:

You have to plan ahead and she has these birthday parties. She was like, "I want to go to Sam's birthday party"... and I am like well what are we going to get him and she is like well, "I don't know...he likes this and this and this." And I am like how old is he going to be. And she is like "10" and I am how about I give him \$10.00... and she is like that is dumb and I am like no that is a great gift. And that will be fun and that is what I am going to end up doing...And she finally agreed. So I am going to get 10 of those gold looking coins and give them to him.

Again, she wanted to ensure Noelle did not feel different than her friends. She wanted to ensure Noelle fits in among her peers, both at school and social events she was asked to attend.

Agatha always puts herself last and consistently sacrificed any social events for herself to make sure her daughter was taken care of; she did not speak of one social event

she attended in any of our conversations. Her social interactions were different compared to Finn and Zipporah's because she hung out with other moms and parents from Noelle's school, not other students' on-campus. One positive aspect for Agatha were these interactions did provide support and distractions from her financial challenges and her current situation.

**Mental and physical implications.** At varying levels, Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha began to experience a physical and mental strain, which weighed on them over time as they had to think about finances. They each had to move money strategically around to accommodate expenses, while negotiating purchasing options that fit within their budget, requiring thought and intentionality. Financial decisions were not rushed and required deliberation and an assessment of budgetary restraints. As well, there was always pressure to determine how they could obtain more money: job, scholarships, or financial aid.

It was reminiscent of when someone does not have enough of something, so that is all they can think about, how they can get more. For example, if I do not have enough food, all I think about is food; if I am not happy, all I think about is what would make me happier. This takes up more room in my daily thoughts, distracting me from what I really need to be focusing on: academics, family, and job.

For Zipporah, her financial challenges have begun to take more of her time and thoughts than she preferred:

In the beginning of school and actually right now...I am trying to do study abroad and it has been hard also some of the financial aid won't cover like airfare, buying things like a suitcase, some of my jeans are ripping because I don't buy clothes a lot and so I have to put money aside for that and those do cross my mind.

Sometimes I need to put school work aside and apply for financial stuff...because I may be in class but I am not really in class because I may be thinking about money and stuff like that.

Zipporah described the concept of “not really being there,” both mentally and physically. Often, the stresses of life pulled her in different directions affecting her concentration.

Agatha attempted to provide a normal life for her daughter so she did not feel deprived of things, with which she may not have in her current life. Agatha tried to plan as much as she could because her daughter likes structure. This requires time, resourcefulness, and energy on the part of Agatha. It has other implications impacting Agatha’s self-care and managing her own life and needs:

I try really hard to do three meals and three snacks, so I do food planning and pack things on Sunday for the week but by the time Sunday comes around I am tired from the week and exhausted. It is hard, I am in school all the time, and I nanny, and my kid needs me and I have to do whatever for the school and it gets to be so exhausting and I am hungry and angry – I am hangry...I can’t be productive for everyone all the time and then I am not taking care of myself.

Her financial challenges, along with being a single mother, make keeping her head above water next to impossible at certain times throughout the semester. At the end of the day, she was often exhausted and “hangry” which impacted being the mother and student she strived for daily.

A similar situation occurred with Finn when his car broke down. The money he was planning to use for food and other essentials from his job had to be shifted and saved for car parts once his car could get fixed. This made his transition to college more challenging, impeding both social and physical needs as the semester continued.

The above examples are snapshots of this thought process and the physical and mental strain occurring in each of their lives. This can happen daily depending on the

situation. Agatha had been aware of this strain in her life since making the decision to stay at home with her daughter, thus it was taxing, yet she was aware of it and had adapted over time. It did not make it any less difficult, but she had become resourceful in the process. Finn and Zipporah had initial shocks, which altered how often they had to think about finances when choosing to have more financial independence. Though Finn's independence was most recent, it had been an additional challenge, which required more time and attention than he imagined. Zipporah had been financially independent for about two years. She became more strategic over time, yet still used more energy than she had to reconfigure finances and ensure she was not limited in her opportunities as she continued her studies.

### **Strategizing Budget Priorities**

This theme highlights the utilization of food resources and purchasing decisions made when accessing food. The food pantry is a resource students began using to supplement their budget, however, they also accessed other grocery stores and retail outlets. Finn visited a Walgreens, a national pharmacy, or King Soopers, a local grocery store chain, two times during the fall semester. Zipporah visited Sav-A-Lot, a national grocery store chain, offering lower prices twice during the fall and Sprouts, a local natural and organic grocery store once. Agatha visited King Soopers once a week and occasionally Sav-A-Lot and Eshon's, a discount store, every three months.

### **Negotiation**

When making food purchases, participants must negotiate between items. For Zipporah, negotiating occurred between items on sale and those not on sale when she



went to the grocery store. As well, she had to allow for compromise when satisfying her sweet tooth:

Like I love mango. And I love lemon and lime and I like to put them in my water and when I went to [grocery store] I bought a combination like four lemon and four lime and I think it was because they were having a sale like 5 for \$1.00, and I was like good deal! And if it wasn't like that I would have gotten like two and it would have been like .30 cents something and even with that I still have to dictate what I get... and there are times that I am still like [\*\*\*\*] it like you know...I had been craving sweets and I was like oh, this ice cream and I don't regret getting it because it was good ice cream but it was like \$3.00 so I had to calculate the things and I was like I don't really need this [other things besides the ice cream].

Zipporah needed to fulfill desires as well, and during this grocery store visit she strategized her budget priorities to include a special treat.

Zipporah spoke of a similar example when using some of her budget to purchase items at the grocery store. Her limited budget impeded what she could select:

And it is really, even if, I know when I went to [grocery store], I couldn't be like I am going to buy this and this and that ... It was I need this and this and meat and I am going to get this [indicating thru actions that she has a grocery list in her hand], I want some dessert but can I really afford dessert

It was difficult for Zipporah to go the grocery store and not purchase items she really wanted. In a way, she felt restricted in her choices, because she is on such a strict budget. She consistently had to negotiate, even though she also allowed for splurging occasionally. Splurging occurred within the strain of her financial situation. Often this required fulfilling a desire, her sweet tooth, instead of getting something she knew she may need for meal planning during a given week. Although it did not happen frequently, when she explained these instances, it reminded me of feeling frustrated due to consistent discipline and focus, and giving into it when you have pushed yourself for long enough,

offering yourself a reward. For example, someone is dieting and has lost weight over two weeks, so rewards themselves with ice-cream on a hot day.

### **Sacrificing**

Finn's limited budget hindered items he purchased to meet his weekly food needs.

Finn had to weigh options depending on if he had enough money for the week. In

considering his options, he chose certain items over others when purchasing from

Walgreens or King Soopers:

Usually I would get milk more often, and breakfast...I only have 14 meals a week so I would get cereal or something for breakfast or a few snacks for the day ...but when I go to the grocery I am now just able to buy the milk.

Finn used the campus food pantry to help supplement his 14 meal swipes a week or to supplement items he was unable to purchase from the grocery store:

Because when I do get paid I do go get snacks but when I don't or am low on money then I have to depend on...the food pantry to survive so the financial is a big part of what you eat, and the choices you have.

In using the pantry, his budget had the ability to stretch further and reduce the restrictions in his choices daily. Due to his financial strains, he had to strategize which items he would purchase or take from the pantry. This often required sacrificing an item he usually would pay for to fill in gaps with his current meal plan. Occasionally there has been a gap in time prior to Finn getting paid thus, "...the protein shake I have in a bag is from last semester...but if that one runs out I have to wait until I get paid to get a new one," of his protein power for working out. Without the additional resource of the campus food pantry, his finances would be further strained.

## Resourcefulness

As a single mother, Agatha's situation required some different strategies for accessing food and negotiating choices whether at the grocery store or the pantry. When you are only worried about your own needs, you might eat whatever is available, even if it may not be an adequate meal for others. However, because she has a daughter she has had to elicit additional sources for a consistent variety of food.

For Agatha, utilizing her resources, includes reaching out to the current family support system she has created. She does not have family nearby, thus created relationships she has maintained to survive day-to-day struggles. These relationships include other women and their families in the community who provide additional sources of food and social support for Agatha and Noelle. "These women are important to me and they are my friends. I also recognize it is probably strategic that I am friends with them." These relationships allowed Agatha and Noelle to fill in gaps in their food budget which often were lacking in quality and adequacy.

Agatha can include these resources as an option for accessing food. As we discuss these relationships, this realization occurred for her:

I feel like all of my relationships are based on trying to move food around so we can eat you know and it is ...the lack of food in my life ... (pause) has caused me to make every relationship I have about a way to get closer to food. Which is just surreal to hear myself say that but it is what it is.

We also agreed everything happens for a reason and this support system is what Agatha and Noelle need now to keep their heads above water. She recognized, though the maintenance of these relationships was not meant to be intentional, it now served another purpose; sharing what she can provide, to get closer to food:

Sometimes we have variety when we are at friend's houses... they grow a lot of their food and I have grown in their gardens before and have a small little patio in my condo. So not a lot of room to grow here, but I rake their lawn and harvest and do dishes...but the implication is that they will feed me for doing this labor for them. 'Since you are here...stay for dinner.' So it is not like I am doing this in exchange for food but when I am over...what can I do to be of service to you and make your life easier. So when they feed me it is not resented. They are feeding me and my daughter and I am thankful for that.

The relationships were twofold: Agatha received food and socializing and she provided baby-sitting services and household chores to assist them in their daily lives. There was motivation to be friends with these women and their families, which allowed Agatha to make life easier for her friends as well, "...because she [her friend] fills voids in my life and I am grateful." In short, she felt needed and appreciated.

Within the last couple years, Agatha has nannied for different families and has been able to eat breakfast or lunch at their houses. During the summer, they often ate dinner at friend's houses and they joined a cooperative (COOP):

Where you go and do yardwork and we grew our own zucchini but every Wednesday night they had a pot luck and I was like thank god for the pot luck. We would eat dinner every Wednesday night with this garden COOP...they would be like try some of this healthier pork loin that I would not be able to afford by myself and we would have a solid protein once a week.

This offered her relief in her weekly meal planning. She knew she had access to these consistent outlets weekly, alleviating exhaustion and frustration around planning dinners.

Agatha volunteered at her daughter's school and this can provide another opportunity to get closer to food. By saying "yes" to requests from the school, she strategically provides she and her family another resource for accessing food:

They had a teacher luncheon at [school] recently and I said I will organize that and I said I would call everybody to bring in this and that... and I had arranged that but it was my job to set it all up. And in setting it all up I was like I can eat

this food now. And I am also positioning myself to be the person in charge because they are fringe benefits to being closer to the food. And that sounds crazy but...no that is what I do for myself ...I always think where can I go to get a snack to stick in my pocket for my kid tomorrow. I can I accomplish that and I find being a service to people I find that there is always a way to get closer to the food.

Though these opportunities required more of Agatha's time and energy, they served a greater purpose. She could access food, socialize with other adults and parents, and give of her various skill sets.

Other strategies she used were shopping at a local grocery store where items are sold for a cheaper amount:

And things that fall off the shelf and get bent sell there for very cheaply and if milk is to go bad in like two days...and everything is a significant mark down and a lot of food that will expire in the week and it may taste a little bit stale an old but...you know it is fine, we get a little bit more. I try to go there every three months.

As well, she knew when places offered free or reduced items on certain days and strategically rearranged her schedule to benefit from these perks:

And we get the free Friday item and sometimes we will just go for that and when [Starbucks] has their free samples, um... [Sam's club] their free foods and we will go there for lunch it is all strategic. Where and when and why we go.

In being resourceful, Agatha does have to plan each of these strategic moves. She used a friend's membership to Sam's to go there and must be mindful in planning how these free foods fit into their daily intake, whether breakfast, lunch, or dinner.

### **Financials Impact Budget Priorities**

These first two themes are connected, because when students have financial challenges, they must strategize budget priorities. They begin to negotiate between

options, are intentional in their decision making, and this has physical, social, and mental implications. For those not as financially burdened, understanding the amount of time and energy these financial challenges have on an individual is difficult. Others may think about it, but then go back to their own lives, their own concerns.

This made me think about my daily purchases and decisions surrounding spending. On any given day, I may not make a single purchase, I have enough of what I need for the day; for example, food and gas for my car. However, I have prepared for that earlier in the week. I went grocery shopping and bought whatever I needed, while meeting or exceeding my weekly loose budget for these items. There was flexibility in this budget, I do not have to go back and forth between two items, my budget allowed for both. The same for gas in the car; I am close to empty so I fill up the tank. I am in the mood for a hot tea or a chai latte; I stop and pick one up throughout my day, I do not second guess or negotiate with myself the \$2.75. I just purchase it. I started to think about this example after initial interviews with participants. Impulsive purchases would not be something they could do; they pass the coffee shop even if they are in the mood for a hot drink. It is an option, but would provide additional stresses and implications on any given day, impacting choices made throughout the week.

In the next section, I consider how participants make decisions about the healthfulness of their choices. After introducing how Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha prioritize health, their use of the food pantry is discussed. Finally, I explore how they define and interpret having enough in their daily lives.

### **Prioritizing Health**

Whether food was used to replace fuel lost during work-outs, for overall health and wellness or to satisfy hunger, access to a variety of options over the course of the week was important for all participants. Their selection of certain items over others was considered as they assessed additional finances for food or non-food items, from various resources including, visiting the pantry. When considering their resources, Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha regularly assessed the healthfulness of their food options, though at times must compromise health due to cost or access to what they perceived to be healthier foods. They believed a healthy lifestyle is crucial as a college student. However, other aspects of their college experience took precedence, including working, paying bills, and attending to academics.

### **Fuel**

Finn saw healthy eating as “a diet that fits your lifestyle...if you exercise a lot, if you waste a lot of energy, you definitely need more and you need to eat to get the energy back you used.” His version of health focuses on food being used for fuel. As an athlete, this perspective assists him in fueling his body for a workout and for recovery after his workout. Food helps his body be prepared to perform to his potential during his workout.

With regards to the food pantry:

There are some things that are healthier than others...depending on what you want to eat...Some people donate vegetables or food you can actually cook yourself ...and then anything that is more healthy than ramen noodles because you can add your own stuff or what you like.

He appeared to recognize healthfulness in the choices around him but may not always pick these options. This was the case with the food pantry because his goal was to get snacks, which his meal plan does not provide for him.

The snacks may not always include carbohydrates, fats, proteins, fruits, vegetables, and dairy he described as including in his total diet intake. In selecting snacks, he was choosing for fuel; finding items which would keep him satisfied until the next meal. This occasionally required compromising balanced, healthier options at snack times. He made up for this by accessing balanced, healthier options in the dining hall if he was strategic in his meal planning.

### **Balance and Creative**

Eating and consistent food intake was not always at the center of Zipporah's daily concerns. Therefore, she could stretch both her budget and current food supply, making it last longer to meet her needs. She did believe eating is a balance, "...you need to have your greens, but also your fruits and your meats and your fats and your sugar and carbs." However, she had identified barriers to eating healthy. These included time, transportation, and money, which impeded access to foods located off-campus. Due to where her apartment was in location to area grocery stores, transportation could be an issue. Time was an additional barrier due to her current class schedule.

Zipporah believed the pantry offered a variety of foods and they were considerate when selecting foods that are healthy and convenient for college students, requiring less preparation times. She has been able to find options which could assist in creating balanced meals and not just snacks. Since she liked to cook and was creative, she was



adventurous, finding items to make flatbread pizzas, burgers, and meatballs with spaghetti.

### **Maximizing Nutritional Value**

Agatha spent time looking at labels and considering the healthfulness of options she provided for herself and her daughter. There was a misconception surrounding how healthy some options are in relation to what they are providing, so being strategic in what she brings into the house was important. She described this misconception when explaining foods her mom provided:

She [her mom] bought me 100 calorie crisps and I was like mom but they are still Oreos...not that Oreos are expensive but I would never waste money on Oreos, because there is no nutritional value in it whatsoever. But she was like look I bought you these and they are healthier and I was like this is an oxymoron...spending money on what you can and what you are actually getting out of it. In being poor, it has taught me to eat healthier.

Since she was limited in her choices occasionally she needed to maximize the nutritional value to feel secure in what she was providing for herself and Noelle. Though some food choices displayed a perception of health due to controlling the portion size or providing the security of a health claim on the front of packaging, this does not mean they provide adequate nutritional value.

Agatha experienced a similar feeling as Zipporah when choosing healthier options on a limited budget. She tried to be considerate when choosing foods from the food pantry, filling the void of not being able to have access to the variety of options she had in the past:

You know like as far as the quality of the food I eat and everything... when I go to the [pantry] I try to get the brown rice and the quinoa or the fruits and it may not be the same as getting the fresh produce from [grocery store], which is a high

end grocery store I used to shop at when I had money or the farmer's market which was where I shopped at when I had money, but I am still trying to make decisions...that are nutritious and have value and give my family the energy that it needs.

In listening to her describe some of the food items, I am struck by her determination to provide and consider the quality of foods she offers. Part of this is tied to how she used to live with a flexible budget. I know it must be hard to not be able to select items at the store she used to; instead, having to choose the cheaper option or cut out an option all together, which may compromise quality and health.

When discussing the overall quality of the foods received from the pantry, Agatha stated:

I spent a lot of time looking at the nutrition labels, added sugar, whatever...and there is definitely...like I know what goes on sale at the store like, I know that *[quality]* is not the first priority. The idea that beggars can't be choosers...but I spend time looking at the labels...I am not in a place to complain...You have to go in with open eyes and be ok with what you are getting.

She highlighted the importance of looking at labels though at times, I interjected with the mere importance of getting food into Noelle's body. She concerned herself with additional information and added stress surrounding food that to someone not in her position might seem trivial.

She also felt individuals who have a restricted budget do compromise health for free or reduced foods, which may not have a similar quality:

Even though we don't have money we can still eat healthy...To be in this income bracket and have a conscious about what you are eating is very rare...so we eat less, I buy better quality things and we are like, ahhhhh... but we are hungry more often.

Since she chooses to spend her budget on some items costing a little more to offer healthier options, they come up short on amounts at each meal. Agatha realized this may not be the best strategy but she was not willing to compromise the healthfulness of options offered in her home:

Our eggs are brown. Brown, cage-free eggs are *always* [emphasis added] more expensive than white eggs, but for whatever trivial reason, getting white eggs makes me feel poor. I know they are the same product and they taste the same and they come from the same place but getting eggs that make me feel like it's not so bad are a quality of life issue, so I get the eggs that feel better, economics be damned...however trivial that is...but it's what I do.

Worrying about aspects of food items, which are not as relevant as just getting in calories and nutrients, is a constant concern for Agatha. As I listened to her talk about items she chooses over others, I wondered if she was worried about what others see in her shopping cart in the grocery store or when she is checking out. Her actions around accessing food were often internalized, as if she is assessing her role as a mother based on the foods she brought into the house.

The type of meal planning she provided for her and her family required her to also consider variety and how to stretch certain food groups so they do not always feel like they are eating the same thing over and over:

I am so [\*\*\*\*\*] tired of looking at tuna fish, I cannot tell you... we go to the deli on occasion so I can show [Noelle] the better quality deli meat and [Noelle] is like "can we get that..." and I am like, ok...it is just that since our food budget is the way it is, I have to see how things shake out in the end. But we can get deli meat for one week and then the next week peanut butter and jelly and or tuna...I am just tired of looking at the same three options for her.

She must be mindful in what she offers to ensure variety and decrease redundancy or boredom among choices. Eating at friend's houses or attending an event at school

allowed for selection of different foods than what was offered at home. Mindfulness in her eating patterns was mirrored in a similar way when utilizing her resources throughout the month.

### **Hunger and Satisfaction**

Agatha was the only participant who talked about the feeling of hunger numerous times throughout the interviews. Finn talked about it once during the couple days in the beginning of the semester, where he did not plan accordingly and used all his meals for the week prior to the weekend. He knew it would be a rough couple of days, because he may not have enough to eat. The following focuses on a few instances when Agatha described being hungry, because this impeded prioritizing health in her given situation.

It can be a difficult decision for Agatha to decide between adequate food quality versus sufficient amounts and this decision does impact her level of hunger. Agatha had been hungry for a long period which lingered:

It feels like it is never going to go away...when I get hangry, I am like I need a snack and the thing is I am too...maybe because I am older but I can tell when I haven't had a veggie...I try to eat fresh whatever I can.

Her body can feel it and she knows she must be strategic to meet physical needs for herself.

She tried to keep meals as healthy and balanced for her daughter, including foods from different food groups, "I do my damnest to make sure it is balanced even if it doesn't go together...like peanut butter and rice. But you are going to eat that protein and I call it by what it is." She saw this as an important part of her role as mom, since no one did this for her growing up.

Agatha spoke about ensuring Noelle is taken care of first, so she does not go to bed hungry. This sacrifice was unique to her given situation because she was the only participant who had a dependent child; thus, had another mouth to feed. An example of the interchange between she and her daughter occurred when they were sharing a meal together:

Yea, when we split something I always give her the bigger half and she is like, “but mom you are bigger, you should get the bigger half.” So there is this interplay between us. We are just looking out for each other. I see her as someone that needs the calories and should not go to bed hungry.

She ensured her daughter understood they would not be in this situation forever. She was hopeful with her degree, a consistent job teaching, and a flexible schedule she would be there for her daughter and provide more than enough.

The same interchange occurred when Noelle wanted to share the little she had with her own mother:

So when my daughter and I don’t have enough we share more with each other. Last night my daughter wanted to share her dinner and I said “No baby...you are hungry, you eat it.” But it broke my heart because she knew I was hungry, but it was bonding, it was good but it was sad too.

In looking out for each other, space was allowed for understanding between them. They looked out for each other and had a genuine concern for the others’ wellbeing due to their current situation.

### **Food Pantry Uses and Strategies**

Participants used the campus food pantry for food and toiletries in different ways and for varied reasons. Finn used the food pantry bimonthly to supplement his campus meal plan; Zipporah used the food pantry weekly to supplement her \$30.00 a month food

budget; and Agatha used it weekly to supplement a \$100.00 a month food budget for two people. Participants negotiated choices among items within the pantry and those they could afford or were provided via other resources, maximizing the potential the pantry offered. The pantry allowed for flexibility within their strict budgets and providing roughly \$5.00 - \$20.00 a week in additional items to be used for meals or snacks. Depending on items participants selected, each item ranged from approximately \$.50 cents – \$2.00 each. Over the course of a month this could equate to roughly \$20.00 - \$80.00 assisting for participants on a strict budget. The higher end of this range would be if an individual selects perishable items only which the pantry GA purchases from local grocery stores.

The lower cost items included cans of vegetables and beans, granola bars, cereal containers, and ramen noodles, while higher cost items included meat, milk, eggs, fresh fruits, and some toiletries. The pantry offered a variety of items for students, though individuals know certain days the pantry GA goes shopping, so the amount and variety of items received by students is increased on those days.

Each participant used the pantry at varying levels throughout the semester, each of them receiving different types of food when they went. Finn used it for snacks; Zipporah for meal supplements, yet also grab 'n go items, and Agatha to supplement any area in her meal planning which needed assistance. All usually had an idea of items they could receive from the pantry, so would select accordingly providing them with what they needed for the week to fill gaps: snack items, meal replacements, fiber full options, whole grain alternatives, or fruits, and vegetables.

What they took from the pantry was driven by their food preparation skills and equipment available to them. Finn thought he would cook more in college. However, since he lived in a residence hall and had no time to make a meal, this was not the case. In using the pantry, he often selected snacks to fill the void between meals on his campus meal plan, which did not require any cooking skills. Zipporah had non-perishable items, thus used the pantry for supplemental items to make meals. She was creative and used cooking skills she had learned from her mom in her own kitchen. She did not need a recipe or to review an idea online, she looked at ingredients and could put a meal together based on what she had available. Agatha also used the pantry to fill gaps and though she did not like to cook, she knew she had to have a variety of options available for Noelle. In using the pantry for additional items, she could offer more variety from all food groups.

Over time participants' experiences with the food pantry have changed. For each student, there was a general uneasiness with utilizing this service. Feelings varied among participants at initial use, though all participants were appreciative this support service was available to them as an option. Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha have moved from a vulnerable, uncomfortable feeling to a positive, grateful understanding surrounding their utilization of this resource now in their life.

### **The Safety Net: A Humbling Experience**

For Agatha, the food pantry was used as a safety net, ensuring additional items throughout the week to supplement what she could buy on her limited budget. Her daughter sees there is an increased number of items offered, implying they have adequate

access to a variety of foods. She did not necessarily like to go, but knew having food was worth it. She used some of the items to show Noelle the abundance they had:

I put the raisin bran out and the cake mix...so I stage my house so my kid thinks we have food. Though if you opened my fridge or cupboard...there is not a lot in there. It is like we are ok, just so she feels like we have enough.

When I visited their condominium, I specifically noted the arrangement of potatoes, butternut squash, raisin bran, crackers, soup and other boxed food items displayed on the ledge separating the kitchen from the dining space. I felt this did imply they had more than enough to get by, though it also felt cluttered due to the set-up of the rooms.

Agatha does use the pantry to fill gaps where health is concerned. She read that fiber helps you feel full, so:

Today I went to [location of the food pantry] ...and there are all these boxes of cereal and I am like great, so we got like five boxes of cereal, like raisin bran because it has good fiber in it and I know it is stupid but this is good things to feed my kid because she won't be as hungry as often. And she is like, 'oh I don't want raisin bran that is old people cereal', and it is funny when I was younger that is what my granny ate and that is the choices I am making ...because there are other things I could have gotten.

I appreciated her thoughtfulness about satiety, and nutritional components, such as fiber, which helps keep you fuller longer. However, in visiting the pantry, I noted that there were meal items she could use to stretch her total calories and nutrients throughout the week. Instead she tended to fixate on one aspect of food and searched for options which met a certain standard for her whether it was fiber, whole grains, added sugar, or total fat. These standards seemed to vary week to week.

Since using the food pantry, she has been able to supplement items received into her current budget, allowing a little more flexibility for perishable items to be bought at



the grocery store. Her limited food budget made it hard, but now in using the pantry she was given more flexibility in her meal planning. Though I do believe she would benefit from meal planning assistance and how to best use items offered by the pantry.

In the past, Agatha visited an area food bank, which was “miserable” for her and “felt looked down upon.” As well, the quality of some of the items, such as soda and cupcakes, were not what she thought was appropriate to feed her family, even if it was free. This has not been her experience with the campus food pantry and she appreciated it:

The people there are just...they don't have that about them. They are like 'Hey, how are you doing? How is the weather?'...and it is less of...a burden to go there, they are more real about that...humbling, humbling is the word I think of...it really puts things in perspective because you never know that it could be you.

She did not use the pantry as a social outlet but was treated with kindness and respect and there was a sense of normalcy attached to using the pantry. It has become a weekly errand she adds to her “to-do” list.

There were often others selecting items for the week when she visited the pantry:

It is funny, because there is a look in someone's eyes of 'oh, you are here, when I am here.' And it is an embarrassing thing. So we try to keep it real like 'oh, hi, how you doing? This is really good have you had this?'...and I don't want to be embarrassed because it is something we need...And it is like, in the sub text of people's eyes like, 'oh, crap you see me.' And I am like, 'It is fine.'

Agatha also had a feeling of embarrassment with using the pantry, possibly due to her recent need to use the pantry, because she came from wealth and this was not a resource she used in the past. It felt embarrassing because in the moment she could not believe this was her life now. She recalled visiting a food bank in high school as part of a class and now she was using one to help fill her own pantry.

### **Self-Care: Social and Physical Nourishment**

Zipporah began using the pantry consistently in fall 2016, because she knew she had to take care of herself. It was her responsibility; no one else was going to do this for her. She knew she had to take matters into her own hands and once she had been encouraged to use the pantry, it became a resource she used on a weekly basis:

I have to take care of myself I have to make sure that I am fed. If I worry about what people think I am probably going to starve to death. Are these people going to come over and make sure I am eating well and stuff like that...I think it is an excellent thing because...you need to eat well to succeed in school and stuff... and I go to the pantry and get things I don't have.

Zipporah was a responsible student who in taking care of herself, created a level of independence which required being resourceful and finding alternative options to help fill in the gaps. The food pantry was one of the strategies which she had begun including:

So it is really nice and it is a blessing because you I know I talk about food and I have not been struggling with food that much. And if my mom knew she would probably send food to me or something like that but I also know some people who struggle a lot more than me and the fact that this system is out there...

In reviewing this statement, I asked if her mom knew she used the pantry. Her response indicated she did not allow her mom to know she was struggling because she would then offer help. Again, this showed her determination to remain financially independent as she steered her way through college.

In using the food pantry, Zipporah has found this resource to be helpful due to its convenience. She relied on accessing foods closer to campus, yet this could be limiting at times:

I don't live near any stores...It is walkable but it is kind of far and after you go and shop you have all of these things and then you have to walk back, so

transportation, also time, when I get up I go to classes and then after that I might have to do other things or if I come home I am so tired and I feel I never have enough time, to actually go and buy anything.

It was easier to get food on campus than take the bus to a grocery store, since she does not have a car. When she was limited on time, transportation, and money, the food pantry filled the void.

As a student struggling to keep her home pantry filled with a variety of options, she could seek assistance from the pantry:

So the food pantry is wonderful, before I found out about it, I didn't think I would starve but I didn't think I would have variety. I thought I would be eating rice all the time. I thought I would run out of food soon and the [pantry] took that pressure off of me and like...I didn't have to wonder about food but could worry about classes.

In listening to her describe what the pantry has offered, I am struck with her sense of relief. She worried about finances, food, transportation, academics, and her study abroad trip and she was hard on herself. I believe in asking for help from the pantry she began to shift her concerns to her academics during the latter half of the semester.

Zipporah originally was embarrassed for using the pantry, but now she sees it as a social, welcoming place. "I go over there...I do my homework." Even though the food pantry, "felt like it was a hand-out," she is now more accepting of it as a part of her life, "At first I was self-conscious that I was going there but now I am like, I am going to the ...pantry you want to go with me...like I tell people about it and stuff." She was embarrassed because she felt like she was going to be the only student using the pantry. However, this changed once she realized the nature and culture of the pantry was

welcoming and she was not going through this alone. The pantry allowed her to feel comfortable, providing a safe space for her to socialize and study.

She often saw others at the pantry when she visited, which has created a feeling of “I am not in it alone.” In clarifying what this meant for her she stated, “...and seeing other people come there and get food helps you know you are not the only student that is utilizing the...service.” There was a commonality between students, if other students were using this service, then that makes it more acceptable. “You know you never want people to be in that situation, but to realize that it is not so embarrassing or you don’t have to go out and get stuff from somewhere,” was reassuring for her.

She originally started going to the pantry with a friend:

And like at one point we had a pattern of going every Friday, to see if they had eggs or something like that, so just interacting with her helped me a lot in overcoming, I don’t know...being a beggar, so it was like, it comes out of people’s heart...I can be there and help other people who are self-conscious going in...and felt the way I felt about being a beggar, overcome that. You never know, even if you don’t talk to the person, you can detect it by just being there. That is the whole aspect I have come to realize by being at the pantry.

She believed in going to the pantry she now can help others who may be in a similar role and are just beginning to use the pantry also understand they were “not in it alone.” This has created a helpful, generous spirit within her as the pantry is more than just a place to get food. The pantry is accepting of all students’ needs and “...a place to hang-out.” Not only does the pantry provide food but a chance to unwind and be herself:

When I go there...I don’t just get the food and leave, like the student who is in charge I will talk to them and they know who I am... ..so we say hi and they say hi and we talk. Like, it is basically the same thing, a place I can go and get food and get social attractions that I probably wouldn’t get...because basically when I get home I lock myself in my room. It is a good way to have interactions with others.

Zipporah has limited her interactions with others due to living further off-campus and addressing new financial challenges. The day we visited the food pantry, I saw a social, engaging, and transparent woman who was friendly, warm with others, and laughed at herself.

Zipporah realized the pantry is a resource, which she appreciates and is now proud to use in her life. Before she used to come and get items and then leave, but recently she has included other ways she can give back:

It is a give and take aspect that you come to realize. Before I would come and take and take the food and not write a thank you card, but now...I will go and grab the food and I am also conscious that it comes from other people's hearts, so even if I take a minute, I can write a thank you card, and do something else in return.

Being grateful and giving back stemmed from her relationship with her mom:

My mom is a big giver. I have talked to her a couple of weeks ago about Christmas shopping and buying gifts for kids at church and her friends and stuff like that, and this is not the first time I have asked her...and I am like why do you buy all these things are these people going to give you a present in return... and she was like 'that is not what it is about, it is not for recognition, it is from the heart.'

Her mom gives and expected "nothing in return." In listening to her talk about her mom and her giving spirit, I understood Zipporah's simplicity in living her life. She was grateful for all she had in her life and wanted to ensure she supported and gave to others in a similar situation. This included giving an extra hand in the pantry and to others using the pantry.

Appreciation for being able to use the food pantry as a resource was one aspect Zipporah found to be priceless. She was overcome with the gratitude for other students

and faculty who donated their time and non- perishable items to the pantry. As a college student, you must juggle many different aspects of your life to do well and succeed:

You are thinking about money and financial aid and you are thinking about homework and quizzes and tests and having a social life so you don't want to really think about what you are going to eat, how you are going to eat, if you are going to be able to eat. It takes away from being a student.

The assistance of the food pantry, however, “gives students a chance to be students.” I found this statement powerful, because it highlighted the relief in having one less thing to worry about, namely food.

### **Back-Up Plan: Providing a Sense of Relief**

Finn used the food pantry when he knew his campus meal plan may not meet his needs for the week. The pantry can fill in the gaps and is one strategy he uses to assist him in accessing foods on a weekly basis. The pantry is a resource available to participants, “just in case you need it.” He further described this strategy as a “back-up plan.” Though it was not his first source for food due to having a campus meal plan, he could use the pantry as a resource because it was conveniently located next to his residence hall. “It kind of feels like...you can depend on it if you know there is a moment that you might fall really low in hunger... just so you don't starve...um, it feels like a good safety choice.” In this statement, he was referring to a safety net. We had been talking about the hunger scale; zero indicates starving and 10 implies being stuffed. Though he did not believe he has gotten to a zero, he was able to use the pantry for snacks and small meals to prevent this from happening.

For Finn, there was intentionality when choosing certain foods from the pantry.

He was limited in the cooking equipment available to him since he lived on campus.

Thus, he must be strategic when choosing items for a meal from the pantry:

I don't always have the ingredients and the only thing I cooked was the pasta because I got everything from the pantry and I asked my RA because she had a pot and other equipment ... but it is hard to go get the materials because everything doesn't fit in the fridge.

He even needed to be strategic when selecting items due to the limited space he had in his mini-fridge. Space in his residence hall drove his selection from the food pantry, as well as the need to cook or not.

Initially Finn was nervous, “because it felt weird, like free food and now it kind of just feels normal.” The food pantry was conveniently located right next to his residence hall; thus, he saw many benefits to using the pantry, “Kind of like free, free meals...or I don't have any money I can easily go the pantry and be like is it ok if I get a few snacks and they are like yea...come get something.” Finn described the pantry as a “sense of relief” after he began using the pantry to supplement his campus meal plan. Finn appeared to not plan ahead, choosing to live in the moment. He had begun being more strategic and not overextending his 14 meal swipes a week like he had in the beginning of the semester. He often visited the pantry on Friday in anticipation of the weekend and depending on how many meals he may have had left for the week.

Finn also began going to the pantry with a friend. “A friend who transferred I told him about the [pantry] and earlier this semester we would actually go together.” For Finn, the pantry was just one other aspect of the college experience which has been added to his life since arriving on campus. He was very appreciative of the pantry as a resource

provided to students. He was also, “really thankful that people are donating to college students.” This was not a service he had considered using prior to attending college or he knew existed on college campuses.

### **Summary**

The general feeling, I received from participants about using the pantry, is it was part of what they do on a weekly or bi-monthly basis. It was a normal for students to use the pantry and not something participants hid from others. They may have told others they used the pantry; they did not think of it as a secret or something they should be hiding from others. If others asked they would tell, and if it never came up in conversation it was left undisclosed. The important consideration when using the pantry was students were receiving access to food.

Each participant used this resource in varying amounts to meet different needs. The pantry allowed participants to increase variety in their food intake, was convenient, and provided options for quick, easy meals and snacks. It was a safety net, provided an opportunity for self-care, and could be used as a back-up plan. As usage became more consistent, a need was filled which allowed for less concern over where to access consistent food each week.

### **Having Enough**

In this section, I highlight specifically how in considering finances, budget priorities, and resources utilized, individuals contemplate having enough, which considers meeting needs and desires or wants. Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha each had experiences wondering if they would have enough food to sustain themselves, though they all recalled growing up with “more than enough” or having “plenty” as children.



From my data analysis, it appears for Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha, having options and variety was part of having enough. Since this was commonly referred to in a similar context by participants and surrounding discussions related specifically to food insecurity and often food-related dialogue, there was a need to explore this further.

Given their current situation there were times when they felt there was not enough. Having enough was not just food-related, it included a feeling of having enough in other areas of the participants' lives. It could be related to having enough of items with a price tag on and others without known value: clothes, self-care opportunities, disposable funds, attention, love, or time. In having enough, participants spoke of being satisfied. In not having enough, they become vulnerable or worried their options may run out.

In discussing this concept, there was also an understanding around things in their life they needed versus things they may have wanted. Having enough bridged these two motivations. Within this dialogue, the realization of a misunderstanding could occur between individuals who did not understand a life which was restricted due to the presence of financial challenges. Though this realization occurred between Agatha and me, it is important to note as an implication for stakeholders. Understanding students' perspectives regarding food insecurity and their experience using a campus food pantry allows space to reflect on what students may need, versus what they want or what another may think they need or want. I explain this distinction later in this section.

### **Three Meals a Day**

Finn had not heard of the term food insecurity, but knew it was related to feelings of security around having, "...enough food for the day." Food insecurity did not resonate with him because he believed he grew up with enough. He realized at the beginning of the semester, he did not have enough food but or a few days, a feeling of scarcity can lend itself to uneasiness and uncertainty over basic needs, such as food.

For Finn, contemplating having enough occurred when he first heard of the food pantry being an option from his advisor during a check-up. "I told him most of the times I wished I had a couple snacks or a couple things to eat because 14 meals a week wasn't enough...and it has been helping ever since." Prior to hearing about the pantry, he was hungry and was unsure if he would have enough to eat daily:

That was the reason I had gotten the job, just to have a little extra money in my pocket to use it for food or whenever I needed it...but after I knew the pantry was there, I could go there just in case.

At the beginning of the semester he started working at the dining hall 10 hours a week which allowed him to have additional income for the semester. Once he heard about the pantry and started using it, he was able to use less money from his budget for food items, since the pantry subsidized this for him.

Having enough for Finn meant being able to eat three meals a day. "Well, I am used to eating three meals a day and with a 14 meal plan it was only two meals a day." He had been used to having three meals prior to coming to college, and now the pantry had to fill the void where the other meal was not covered by his campus meal plan. Because he did not want to experience this feeling again, he had learned to be more

cognizant when using his resources, including the food pantry and his campus meal plan. Since becoming more financially independent, Finn had to manage his budget and strategize meal planning to ensure he had enough throughout the semester.

### **Fend for Yourself**

Zipporah had not heard the term food insecurity. She believed it meant, “So I am guessing when you are not able to fend for yourself, food wise or nutrition wise.” She had always been able to fend for herself, “...I have always had enough.” Upon further probing, she clarified what “fend for yourself” meant to her:

Independence ...I don't want to burden my mom. My mom would welcome it, she will make sure I eat but when you are in college...that includes relying less and less on your parents and finding ways to provide...to take care of yourself and not rely on the people you relied on as much as you used to.

Zipporah highlighted her own reasoning for why she did not ask her mom for help. Her expectation for herself was to be resourceful and not have to rely on her parents.

Many times, Zipporah was intentional when she approached selecting items from the food pantry:

Sometimes I have gone there and I go overboard and grab things that I didn't even need. So like, sometimes I will grab something and I will be like I am looking for this and it is not like I really need it, but I have been looking for it. And if you don't grab it, it might be gone the next day when you think you are going to need it or might need it...sometimes I will grab things I don't need.

She often took items in case she would need them, though she ended up with extra items at the end of month. She described this as a selfish way to use the food pantry. At times, if this was her only option to receive foods, she tended to take more than she needed:

But it comes from a selfish place, I just kept grabbing things without really thinking about it, and if I don't grab it someone else will take it and I might go home and realize I do need it and then when I go back [to the pantry] I will realize

someone has taken it. So it came from a selfish place and I have to remind myself that is not good because I am just wasting things. I haven't thrown anything away but it is just in my cabinet and I am not using it.

To me this seems like an “insurance policy,” an opportunity to stock-up just in case she ran out of options. In getting to know Zipporah, she did not like to take from others who may need it, because she knew others may be worse off than she. Thus, she felt selfish when a can or box was sitting in her pantry and she had not used it.

She was not afraid she would run out of something, though was afraid if she went back to the pantry to get an item they would be out of the item. This could be due to lack of inventory or a busy week of student usage:

It was like if you go to a store and you have a list of things but you always get something you don't need, it is kind of like that...except when I go there [the pantry], like at the store you can decide to not get it and then go back a week later and it will still be there but my thing was if I didn't get it then if I went there tomorrow...or even if I went an hour later, someone would have gotten it so might as well take it and if I don't need it then I can take it back.

There was a feeling of not having enough, due to the pantry being the only option at times. She was inclined to take items, in case upon return to the pantry the item would be gone and not replaced for a given period. It was a strategy she used to ensure she would have enough of the items she preferred. She identified this as selfish and knew if she did not use the item she could return it and felt better about the act of taking more than she needed. For participants, not to take the maximum number of items, was underutilization of the one consistent resource these individuals had at their disposal.

## Providing Plenty

Agatha had heard the term food insecurity and used the term poor and impoverished to describe her situation. Agatha felt pressure to have enough for her and Noelle. She sought enough, both in food and other areas of her life:

I don't like to be poor and I want to have enough and being a teacher I can have enough... It is a weird path to walk down... I hope to get my Master's degree and make more money... That's what I think matters really is having enough and feeling like someone is there for you."

This was one example of ensuring her daughter had enough, such as food, clothing, education, housing, and love. By allowing her daughter time and attention and sacrificing other aspects, such as additional income, she felt she always made sure her Noelle had enough.

Her parents both worked many hours a day and she recalled eating dinner late at night, with cheese and crackers offered as a snack to hold her over until dinner was ready. She had begun creating a different experience for her daughter:

My kid and I eat every night at 5:30 p.m....and I listen and ask her are you hungry, did you have enough, what do you want for dinner... I am always asking her how she is doing in relation to how much food she has had and if she is getting enough.

Agatha was very concerned about her daughter and her health due to her husband's untimely death at a young age. She wanted to guarantee she could give her daughter what she needed, though would love to give her more.

She and her daughter had conversations about food and what was appropriate to meet their needs. "I have neighbors with two little girls and they have so much food over there and I see when they don't want something or don't eat something, they just throw it

down the disposal or in the garbage.” Witnessing the waste of others allowed for an opportunity to reassess their situation. “But my daughter said, ‘I can’t believe they waste all that food...I would eat it’ and I said ‘I know’...but you want to say, ‘yea but we have that food too.’” She consistently needed to reaffirm this with Noelle to ensure she did not feel like they had less than others.

Agatha always puts Noelle first which frequently compromised meeting her own needs. Agatha knew she needed to eat but she had gotten comfortable with being hungry and having just enough or less than what she needed to provide more for Noelle:

Because after every time I eat I realize how hungry I really am...so this is why I don’t like eating, because it triggers my appetite and I need to eat everything in the house, so I am more comfortable with being hungry and not waken the sleeping giant that says you need to eat more food and my body is like ‘oh, you are hungry.’ I am not promoting not eating...but my body is aware that what I am eating is not enough. I can’t skip a meal and be ok...I get hangry...I can’t get mad at my kid, I have to be a mom.

I admire how she maintained her job of being a role model to her daughter. Putting effort and energy into this role daily was tasking and as a single parent she often had to take on the role of both parents and ensuring her daughter did not feel she was missing out on anything in her life.

In her role as mom, she was cautious about making sure Noelle had everything she needed. After one shopping trip, she asked Noelle how getting groceries made her feel:

‘Hungry.’ I tried not to read into that, though my mind went racing. What could that mean? What does she mean? What does that mean? Hungry because you wanna go home and eat? Hungry because...I trailed off...The rest of the thought was because it’s not enough. So we went home and put everything up and I looked in the fridge and then I felt like it wasn’t enough.

Agatha wanted to make sure Noelle had enough because, “I always had plenty and she barely had enough.” I observe, though Agatha feels she does not have enough of items ‘you can put a price tag on,’ she was providing Noelle with other aspects of her life which are invaluable: consistent love, attention, and comfort. These priceless, meaningful aspects were not a plentiful part of Agatha’s childhood and she desperately wants it for Noelle more than food.

### **Deciphering Between Needs and Wants**

In listening to participants, having enough seemed to bridge individual needs and wants, depending on the situation. I use the term wants and desires, interchangeably, though for the remainder of this section will refer to these as wants. For example, an individual might be satisfied because a need had been met even though an individual may have wanted more or something different. Other times, an individual fulfilled a want, allowing for satisfaction, though participants realized they may have needed something, which cost less or was a healthier option, even though they enjoyed fulfilling a want. A want, such as I am in the mood for something specific, can also fulfill a feeling of satiety, resulting in decreased hunger, which could be a need. In this section, I will decipher between three different circumstances participants referred to during our conversations: participants were able to fulfill a need, they were able to fulfill a want, or tension was created which forced them to reconsider their needs and wants.

**Fulfilling a need.** For Agatha, she must consistently ensure her daughter was fed and then she was fed. Ensuring this daily was tasking:

Satiating a need I have so I can get on with my day. Like I think sleep is inconvenient... but crap I have to sleep, I have to eat, in order to be functional in your day. Kind of self-maintenance to be a functional member of society...It is a need that I know I have to take care of so we can be good artist or musicians or whatever we are going to be in the world. Um... we have to fulfill that basic need first.

Once this basic need was met, she then could conduct her day in a more efficient manner, including having energy to do all the things she needed to do. For Agatha, this need was one more thing she most worry about so it weighed on her.

Finn frequently gets items which are snacks to help fill in gaps between meal swipes. This allowed him to fulfill a need, to have items available so he did not get hungry. "If I didn't have the [pantry] there I wouldn't have any snacks at all." Prior to using the pantry, the thought of not having snacks to satisfy his hunger between meals was concerning to him. He had to manage his resources accordingly to determine what he could spend his money on, "...if I have the money and I need something I will buy it in the moment and...I have to take into account what I have and have not spent and what I need to get or not get." This aspect of his budget negotiation seemed to "be in the moment" and required him to decide to buy a new pair of shoes, a need, for his work-outs, since his others were falling apart.

Zipporah did not grocery shop often because it was usually the last resort. She assessed her options before deciding if she really needed to go to the store:

I don't do month to month grocery shopping ... like that, it is more I realize I need this, and I think about it, do I need it and I can see if the [pantry] has it if they don't have it then I can go to King Soopers or Sav-A-Lot and see if they have it...and then I need fruits and veggies, but I am not going to go over \$10 or \$20 dollars.



I try to imagine walking through the grocery store with her. She spends a lot of time thinking through what she would buy and tallies the amount of each item in her cart assessing if it fits within the dollar amount she has set for herself on this given day. The dollar amount is less than or equal to her monthly budget. In stopping to negotiate, there are few quick decisions made in the moment. Most decisions require thought and intentionality when selecting food. Then, the intentional process meets a need, which must be fulfilled.

**Fulfilling a want.** In dialogue with participants, here was the sense a normal part of their food experience was eating or having items they wanted, though they knew they may not need. With food, there can be many different reasons individuals give for why they choose certain items over others. An example of this occurred for Zipporah at the grocery store. She wanted to satisfy her sweet tooth, thus negotiated purchasing ice-cream:

I need this and that and that and if I want something and I haven't had sweets in so long I can spare a \$1.00 or \$2.00 and forego this...I am not saying it is a sacrifice...that makes it sound like without it I would die, but there are many times that I walk back and forth, down the aisle...like the ice cream thing, I stood there for like five minutes. "I really want you" and I think I left and then I come back and grabbed it.

The scenario above is an example of the negotiating and decision making process which required considering fulfilling a want.

For Zipporah, it was worth purchasing the ice-cream, which was "...coffee with chocolate chips, I think I had that in like three days." Her eyes lit up when describing the flavor and the opportunity to indulge in the sweet treat. She did not feel guilty or have any remorse about her decision. It fulfilled a want, "it is like you can't help it," and in doing so contributed to pure satisfaction. Negotiating was not something which happened

quickly, it required thinking through all options to justify and defend why one food item could be purchased over another.

Food was an important part of Zipporah's life, and especially the process of cooking and creating dishes for herself and others. She tried to include foods from each food group to have a balanced diet but sometimes, "...as I am talking to you, I am eating caramel and I know that is not good for me...but I am still eating it because I have a sweet tooth." The caramel was left over from the program the African Students Collaboration hosted the previous week. Though this snack option was not the healthiest, this item was free; a leftover from an event. All the items for the caramel had been purchased through the student group, so this was not an additional monetary cost to Zipporah. She could easily fulfill a want because this item was readily available. She enjoyed caramel and it satisfied her drive to want something sweet even though she knew she didn't need it.

With Agatha, often her dinner may only require one food item. For her she was satisfied, "But I do a lot of yams in the oven, I look forward to my yam, because it is a superfood and feels healthy." She felt good about her decision to choose this food, both because it was satisfying to her and provided health. This was a want, which also satisfied a need; as simple as a single yam.

Finn and his roommate had been wanting to purchase a coffeemaker for their room, but they were expensive. However, on a recent trip to the food pantry he got one for free, which he described during photo elicitation. He was very excited to receive the coffeemaker, it fulfilled a want. He had wanted to make coffee in his room prior to class,

but due to his finances, he did not feel this could fit into his budget, so he had not purchased one. In using the pantry, he could fulfill a need and occasionally even a want.

**Blurred lines.** At times the concept of what individual's need versus what they want is challenged by interactions with others and what is available. There is an initial drive where an individual chooses to decide for themselves what they may need or what they may want. For participants' this drive forced them to alter their budget addressing those opposing sides.

For Agatha, interactions she had with her mother allowed us to have a dialogue surrounding this important concept:

You know so my mom came over and got us yellow rice and a meat and two veggies and some sort of drink and something for dessert and a snack afterwards. And I was like that's great mom but we sometimes just have a potato for dinner. And I want to be able to give my kid variety and options and a meat and a carbohydrate, starch, and veggie but tonight it is like we are going to have this one thing...and that is success to me...as long as she is getting the calories she needs.

Her mom thinks she needed more to have with dinner because that was what she provided Agatha growing up. However, given Agatha's new financial situation, she was often satisfied with just one item, even though this looks different than what she had growing up.

Agatha illustrated how this plays out and retold a story about a childhood friend when thinking about interactions with others who think they know what you need:

This [girl] and her family invited this person off the street for dinner and he is like, this is so nice, thank you so much. And they are sharing their experience and everything ... and they wanted to offer him dessert and he was like I don't want it...no thank you and they kind of [continued to push it on him] and he got mad and got to the door and they said we are so sorry are you allergic or something...and he said you give me dessert, then I know what I don't have every

night of the year. So thank you but no thank you...and that story stuck with me, when ...trying to give people what you think they need ... than what they actually need.

Talking through this misunderstanding allowed for clarity on this concept. Too often we think we know what another person needs instead of simply asking them what they need and responding accordingly. I believe this is an important aspect not only in students who are food insecure, but students using any support service at a HEI.

Zipporah further elaborated on how having enough bridged an individual's needs and wants by explaining further what having enough meant to her:

I think having enough of something is being satisfied with what I have, whether it is more or even if it is less than what I wanted. So, let's say, I went [there, to the pantry] to get green beans and they didn't have green beans and had corn. Even though it is not something I wanted I can still use it, I can still make something out of it. So, having enough is being satisfied with what I have, knowing I will be able to survive and sustain myself on what I have and not worry.

Everyone is satisfied differently. For Zipporah, being satisfied with what she had regardless if it is something she wants, was all that mattered. In discussing a food-related example in the above quote, she also provided a non-food related example to further emphasize understanding, "It would be like going to the movies and not be excited about the movie at all." In providing this example, I gain additional clarification. We both have experienced paying for a movie and not being satisfied with it. You leave with a feeling that it was not enough; you wanted more, you expected more. Thus, in not being satisfied, one is disappointed at that moment in time.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced Finn, Zipporah and Agatha and provided background information to provide context for the themes developed during data analysis. Finn,

Zipporah, and Agatha provided insight into their financial situation, how they prioritize their budgets and thus, purchasing decisions, considerations when prioritizing health, their uses and strategies with the food pantry to access food, and ultimately, ensuring they have enough. These themes and meaning given to participant's experiences are interpreted further, using SI, in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

In this chapter, I provide further interpretation of the experiences of participants using a campus food pantry and food insecurity. I use SI, as a theoretical framework, to provide perspective on meaning participants attach to their experiences with the phenomena, focusing on how this meaning developed, emerged, and was modified over time. Potential implications for stakeholders and considerations for future research and practice are also provided.

#### **Theoretical Implications**

SI guides me in focusing on three primary considerations: a) my participant's responses towards meaning they give their experience with food insecurity and using a campus food pantry; b) the meaning these experiences have as participants' interact with others in their environment, such as, campus support service providers, pantry workers, peers, and myself; c) and meanings addressed and modified by participants' through, an interpretive process, to provide understanding around their experiences of food insecurity and campus food pantry use (Blumer, 2008). SI considers cultural, historical, and socially situated context, and by inserting myself in the research process I more fully understood participant's point of view as they told their story.

In the beginning of this chapter, I provide further interpretation surrounding themes developed during data analysis using SI as a lens. See Figure 1 for a theoretical implication visual. I offer an explanation summary at the end of this section.

### **Identifying Financial Challenges and Implications**

Students struggle with many changes as they progress through their college experience. Financial challenges, identified as a common issue among food insecure populations, is due to the cost of tuition, housing, transportation, food, and other miscellaneous items (Cady, 2014). These challenges began to set the tone for a new way of living and providing essentials Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha needed in their lives. These financial challenges were the overarching reason they were using the campus food pantry.

**Initial meaning.** Both Finn and Zipporah's meaning surrounding financial challenges were less apparent prior to beginning college. They did not speak of having to manage budgets though worked to help pay for things they needed in addition to what their parents provided. Neither student discussed anything that had financial implications impacting physical, social, or mental aspects of their lives.

Agatha grew up with abundance and minimal financial concerns. Even when her husband and she were on their own raising Noelle, they both worked jobs that provided more than adequate salaries. Meaning she gave to her finances was she never had to worry and always had enough.

**Meaning emerged.** Finn's meaning of finances, budgets, and prioritizing essentials had to be thought of in a new light upon entering college. With financial

independence, came a mental shift in thinking about finances, and he had not realized the severity of these consequences when he asked for this independence. He came to realize this in the first few weeks of the semester, when he was not sure if he would have enough food to last and had to begin making sacrifices. This is a common feature among food insecure students. In one study, 57 percent of students did not experience food insecurity as a child (Martinez et al., 2016), yet after coming to college experienced aspects of food insecurity for the first time.

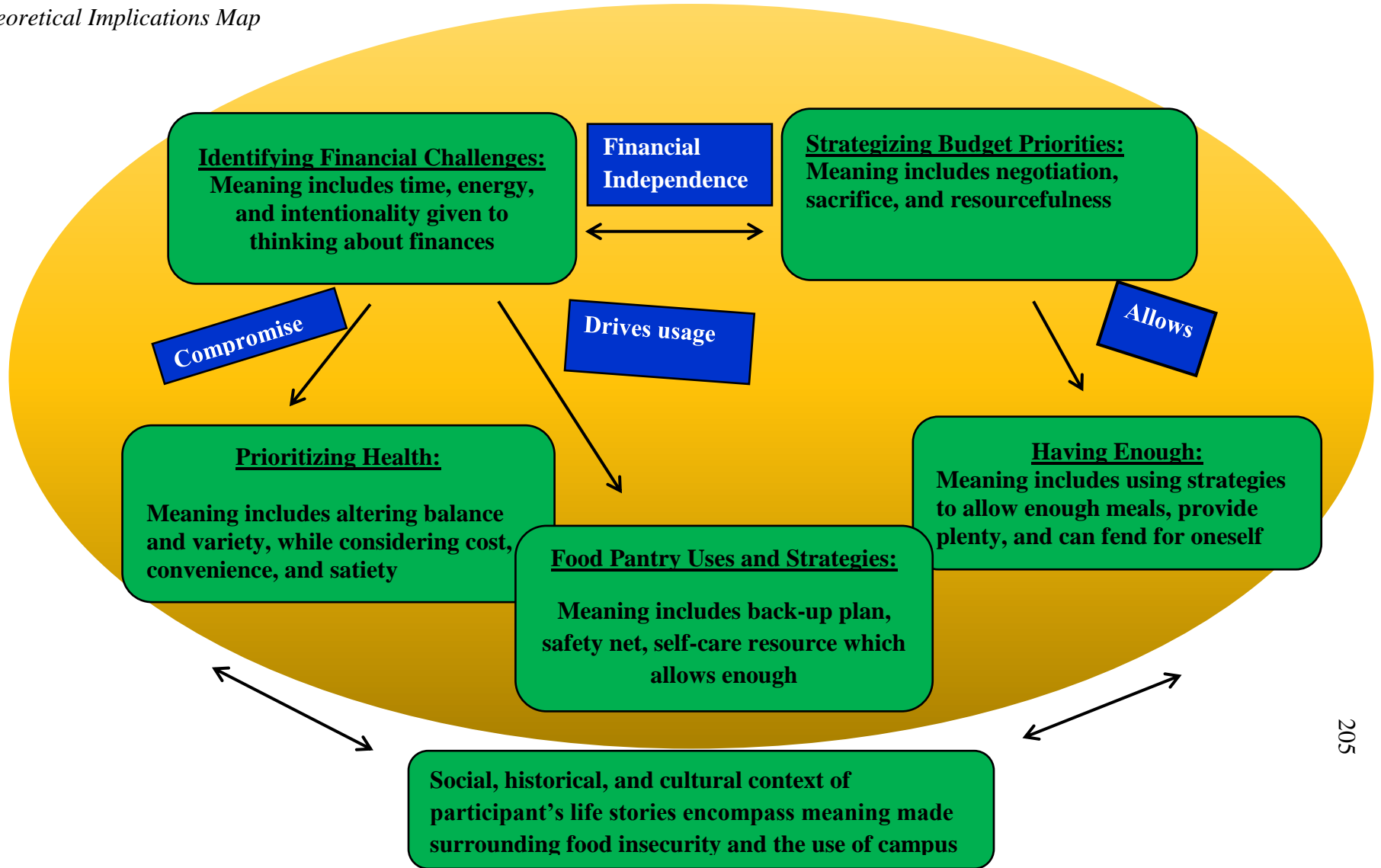
Zipporah came to college with a similar mindset as Finn. She was struggling financially and had committed not to asking her mom for additional money. With her newfound independence came new meaning surrounding financial challenges. During college, she had various jobs or work study, but for the fall 2016 semester had not been employed, requiring sacrificing social activities and often isolating herself. She had to manage her current budget differently than over the previous two years. Many students who are food insecure want to manage for themselves and not ask for assistance (Henry et al., 2014). Often students are reluctant to ask for financial support and will find ways to figure out a solution for themselves.

The meaning Finn and Zipporah gave to their financial challenges was not necessarily influenced by others. Due to the internalization of their financial independence, they had to figure out how to manage by themselves. However, interactions they had with campus support staff allowed them to seek additional resources which assisted in providing some relief within their current budget.



Figure 1

*Theoretical Implications Map*



When she started college, Agatha changed her view of how she was going to live her life and provide for Noelle. She knew money could pay for the things she needed, however, after her husband died, spending time with Noelle and being her mom were more important to her. She knew she was doing the right thing for Noelle, yet this reality was hard to face, because she wanted to provide more to her only child.

The meaning she gave to her new financial situation and its implications was altered by those she encountered and interacted with daily. When talking to or with her mom, she felt she was not providing for Noelle, because she was reminded of everything she did not have by her mom's overcompensation. When with her friends, she felt like this was where she was supposed to be. Without making her current choices, she would not have crossed paths with her new friends, and they gave her strength and support to embrace her current financial situation and the confidence to know everything would turn out. When she compared her situation to other families at Noelle's school, her situation felt vulnerable and insecure; she wished she could provide more for her daughter, so she felt like she was not missing out on what her friends may have in their lives.

**Meaning modified.** After college, Finn hoped to begin his career and provide for a future family. Thus, the way he handled finances and their subsequent implications consistently evolved throughout his college experience. While at one point finances did not drive essentials in his life; he now faced the strain of having to assess, negotiate, and be intentional with his new budget. This will likely continue to be modified each semester throughout his college experience.

Zipporah was a resourceful woman who knew there were departments on campus, which could assist her in figuring out ways to make ends meet with what she had, offering suggestions for additional aid packages. Meaning continued to change as she had to apply for additional scholarships to fund her study abroad trip. She was determined to make her financial strains work out and though this could be stressful she knew this was how she must handle finances and their implications in the future. At one point, Zipporah did not have to contemplate budgetary needs, now she must daily, and this requires additional time and energy.

Meaning continued to evolve as Agatha had to budget herself and assess her expenses. She used to shop at certain grocery stores and could just place items in the cart without even thinking about the cost. Now there was intentionality and decision-making, which takes time and effort. Meaning continued to be modified, as she often felt like she was scavenging, but had come to terms with this fact; she must do this for Noelle and herself at this point in their lives. Initially, Agatha lived a life with minimal financial restraints, now she had shifted to the other end of the spectrum, a life of daily financial, physical, and social strains.

### **Strategizing Budget Priorities**

Due to participants' financial challenges, purchasing decisions were weighed and considered differently than in the past. Depending on their given budget, they each purchased items at various stores throughout the semester and strategized accordingly. Participants' account of where they purchased items, was like two studies specifically focused on where students accessed food. Often, a university meal plan, grocery stores,

friends or roommates, free campus food resources, and the campus food pantry were mentioned by students (Henry et al., 2014; Martinez et al., 2016). If items were not free, this required students considering sale items, certain essential items over others, and having to be strategic when using additional support systems.

Participants found ways to be resourceful given their financial challenges, which were driven by their financial independence. Financial challenges may be the overarching reason they were using the campus food pantry, while strategizing budget priorities was key to budgeting for themselves and learning to live within their means. If participants had not begun strategizing budget priorities or if their strategies were not successful, they would be stretched even further than they currently stated. This could have led to additional implications in all areas addressed in earlier chapters: financial, social, physical, and mental.

With additional financial strains and decreased budget strategies in use, students' basic needs are often more restricted. Students who are housing secure, like Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha did not have this additional concern compared to homeless students. Students who are homeless tend to work more hours per week, get less sleep, and have increased chances of non-completion (Goldrick-Rab, Richardson & Hernandez, 2017). Students who experience increased levels of food insecurity are hungry more frequently, must cut the size of their meals, may not eat for a whole day, and frequently run out of money for food (Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2016). Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha thought about finances more than in the past and this was tasking on their time and energy, impacting time spent thinking about academics. These participants also did not

work over 20 hours a week during the school year, one reason for a decrease in GPA among community college students (Maroto et al., 2015).

Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha did not report seeing a counselor at the health center or being depressed or anxious, which is often an implication of increased financial strains and food insecurity (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2015). Since they had identified coping strategies and maintained a social network, this assisted them in having access to resources and peers supporting a life of increased food security. The strategies they implemented still required them to think more about finances, but did not directly impact academics or mental health per information shared by participants. Meaning surrounding strategizing budget priorities was embedded in participants' financial challenges with their financial independence connecting these two themes.

**Initial meaning.** Prior to college food was purchased by Finn and Zipporah's families, so they had no need to strategize purchasing decisions or budget priorities. Money saved from their jobs, allowed for more flexibility to spend on items for themselves or others, but they were not concerned with family essentials. Agatha had flexibility within her families' finances growing up and this continued when she and her husband were working. They did not have to prioritize expenses, they lived comfortably, providing full-time day care for Noelle, traveling, and eating out weekly.

**Meaning emerged.** Upon entering college and becoming financially independent Zipporah and Finn soon gave new meaning to their budget and how they would manage this daily. Obtaining jobs at food establishments or finding support among friends (Henry et al., 2014), was a common feature among participants. They had to rely on

friends in similar situations or who understood their circumstances were as a consistent support network. They knew others who used the pantry or often their on-campus activities required no to low monetary cost. These interactions assisted participants' in providing meaning around their new social outlets. Since they had to budget priorities, this often conflicted with going out to dinners, movies, shopping, and other activities they were used to doing with their friends in the past. Finding support in different ways, as well as ensuring jobs allowing additional access to food, were key solutions for participants in strategizing their budget priorities. Zipporah worked at a grocery store over the summer and Finn at a campus dining hall; thus, positioning themselves to be closer to food. They had not been informed of any other resources off-campus which could be assistance to them. The pantry was an on-campus resource, which was convenient and filled a gap, thus they were more inclined to use this resource than others off-campus.

The level of independence with which Agatha conducted her life had consequences which recently required her to embrace and maintain relationships with other women and their families. Agatha described herself as a scavenger; she knew the where, how, and when to access food. She had developed these relationships around accessing food and realized the maintenance of these relationships was due to her drive to ensure she had consistent balanced choices and her daughter never went hungry. There is intentionality and a purpose in establishing and maintaining these relationships which shaped meaning she gave to her current experiences. At times, this new meaning allowed for an opportunity to rearrange monies for additional essentials; most importantly

allowing her daughter to have a chance to socialize and Agatha to be with other adults. This was something she never had to do before and now knows the importance of this for both Noelle and herself. Agatha had used an off-campus resource in the past, such as a local food bank, yet had a negative experience, thus preferred support services RMI offered. She was not eligible for SNAP benefits, due to money she received monthly from her husband's death; survivor benefits. Thus, she had begun to find other resources to support her financial situation.

**Meaning modified.** Meaning evolved as Finn realized his meal plan would not support the amount of food he was used to daily. He knew he must strategize and stretch his budget by using the campus food pantry and buying less items at the grocery store or those he needs most. In the past, they did not have to negotiate or sacrifice, now this was all Zipporah thought about when making any purchase or financial decisions, and something Finn also considered most days.

Zipporah now considered the cost of items, including sale versus non-sale items, and this drove her purchasing decisions. She realized this was a practice she must continue to do in her new world of financial independence. Meaning had been redefined to include negotiation of items in her daily life, thus altering budget priorities.

Meaning has been redefined because Agatha had become more resourceful through this process. Meaning continued to evolve as she had to weigh the amount of money coming in from various jobs. The way she managed her money was very different from the past, and was been driven by her current circumstances. Thus, the way she

thinks and talks about finances were altered and she had new perspective on living a restricted, less privileged life.

### **Prioritizing Health**

All participants considered their health and often had to compromise it at the cost of financial burdens when purchasing their own foods. This concern was highlighted among students within the University of California school system who had to consider food options. Forty-three percent of students bought the cheapest food even though they knew it was not the healthiest (Martinez et al., 2016). A consequence of not having enough money, compromises healthy food decisions, aligning with another study of college undergraduate and graduate students between the ages of 18-24 (Betts, Amos, Keim, Peters, & Stewart, 1997). Undergraduates viewed foods in terms of convenience as opposed to the importance of nutrition, while graduates perceived nutritional value to be important, yet lacked adequate skills in purchasing and preparing foods. Knowledge around nutrition and preparing foods is a driving force among student's food choices and healthier eating patterns of college students (Kolodinsky, Harvey-Berino, Berlin, Johnson, & Reynolds, 2007). However, cost ultimately determines what students choose, if students need to purchase the item themselves.

**Initial meaning.** Finn had meaning attached to health and a balanced lifestyle since he played football for over eight years. He had to fuel his body with carbohydrates, protein, and ensure fruits, vegetables, and dairy, while considering lower fat items. These concerns varied depending on his workout.



Zipporah initially attached meaning to her own health. She usually ate a variety of foods, including ethnic specialties and enjoyed trying new flavor combinations. She knew the importance of eating healthy and having balanced meals, including fruits, vegetables, some carbohydrates, and protein at most meals. Agatha had negative influences growing up, and thus her meals were not balanced and the importance of nutrition was less of a priority. Even in a world of abundance, she had limited choices provided to her.

**Meaning emerged.** Finn knew he had to continue to fuel himself if he wanted to try out for the football team again in the fall. He had to prioritize his food choices when selecting items from the dining hall, because meals outside of his meal plan were low in key nutrients and were mostly snack foods. He now had to consider meal planning more of a priority than in the past.

Since Zipporah's financial independence often left her restrained, she had to consider resources, and how they would provide variety. These choices were often driven by time, transportation, and money. Resources close to her, which had minimal to no cost became desirable, such as the food pantry.

Agatha now made health a priority, if not for herself, for Noelle. She had begun looking at labels recently and considered the types and quality of foods offered. Agatha was consistently insightful and used her past experiences to define how she approached her current situation. She recognized meaning she gave to food choices and health growing up was not the way she wanted her daughter to grow up.

How meaning emerged regarding prioritizing health was less influenced by interactions with others, due to participant's internalizing how they individually chose to prioritize health. Agatha's meaning around prioritizing health was derived from interactions she had with Noelle, knowing the importance of making health a priority for her. Finn and Zipporah had to worry about themselves, thus prioritized the healthfulness of their choices based on their needs.

**Meaning modified.** For Finn, in redefining meaning surrounding health he planned meals differently by strategically maximizing nutrition at the dining hall, to provide satiety and fuel he needs. Zipporah had to assess options she could receive from the pantry and options in her current pantry. In considering both, she created meals which provided different food groups and satiety requiring her to balance choices over the course of the week, not daily, like in the past.

Agatha began to prioritize health among the many resources she uses to access food. She now considered the quality of items she offers which required allowing space for certain items, such as brown eggs, whole grains, fruits, and vegetables during grocery store purchases. New meaning to prioritizing health, ensured Noelle and she had variety and options so they do not feel like they were eating the same items repeatedly. Intentionality was required in prioritizing her budget, while always considering what each resource she used provided. The meaning she gave to health was never hard to justify but sometimes hard to follow through on consistently, leaving her feeling hungry. In these instances, she felt defeated and a need for further strategies and resourcefulness in her food procuring practices.

### **Food Pantry Uses and Strategies**

Participants used the campus food pantry secondary to their financial situations warranting it. Participants often selected for convenience, including time to prepare items, while their meaning of the campus food pantry evolved over time.

**Initial meaning.** For Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha initial meaning of the campus food pantry was non-existent. None of the participants knew the campus provided this resource to students, until prompted by advisors and other support services on campus. Though information is posted around campus and shared via word of mouth, these participants had never used a resource, such as the pantry before, so this option was not considered until prompted. Agatha had exposure to a food bank as an adolescent visiting with a class and once as an adult. She realized these resources existed but, given her financial situation growing up and in her first few years of marriage, she did not believe this was something she would ever utilize. She was thankful these resources were available for those who had to use them.

**Meaning emerged.** For Finn, meaning was defined at the initial visit. At first it felt weird, because he just walked in and got free food. It became a convenient resource he could depend on throughout the fall semester. Since his car broke down and he had to put thought and energy into getting to the grocery store, he came to use the pantry as his second resource for food. Interactions with others, such as a friend who used the pantry with Finn and seeing others use the pantry, helped in making usage feel normal.

Though at first Zipporah saw using the pantry as an embarrassment and a hand-out, she came to realize for her to take care of herself she had to be assertive and

appreciative of what the campus offered. She was determined she would not ask her mom for help, thus meaning she gave to her financial independence was driving how she approached budgeting and the resources she used. With these additional financial restrictions came an openness that allowed her to be okay with where she was accessing food. She also began socializing with student workers at the pantry, often visited with other friends, and helped assist the pantry GA with stocking items. These interactions drove her continued use and acceptance of these resources.

Agatha had the opportunity to use the local food bank, this past year, given her new financial strains. The experience left her feeling miserable and uneasy about using food assistance programs. She entered the campus food pantry feeling reluctant and unsure. After a few visits, meaning shifted due to interactions she had with others there. No one judged her, they were helpful, and generally seemed to care about her well-being. She became more accepting of this service over time.

**Meaning modified.** The pantry required minimal planning and Finn just needed to show up and take what he needed. This aligned with his daily habits, planning in the moment, not too far ahead. Meaning he gave to the pantry was a sense of relief; a back-up plan in his own backyard. For Zipporah, she realized she was “not in it alone” and meaning surrounding the food pantry filled physical and social voids in her life. The food pantry allowed her to take care of herself, both physically and socially. For Agatha, she could show Noelle some level of abundance by using food from the pantry to showcase they were doing fine. Ironically, a resource she was using in her current situation was allowing Noelle to experience aspects of what she grew up with: plenty.

Thus, the food pantry as a safety net has been humbling, knowing what she is able to provide her family due to having this resource in their life.

### **Having Enough**

Finn and Zipporah had not heard the term, food insecurity, but realized it was tied to having enough food for the day or the ability to fend for oneself and ensure one had enough. Agatha had heard the term and often used it when talking about being poor or impoverished. She did not think she was food insecure, but this term also aligned with ensuring enough for she and Noelle.

**Initial meaning.** For Finn having enough meant not feeling deprived and having essential items in comfortable amounts for himself. He grew up in tight quarters with his family and, they did not have “fancy stuff,” such as electronics and some kitchen items. Growing up, Zipporah had plenty and never felt restricted. She always had enough of the things she needed. On the surface had everything she could ever need while growing up in a world of abundance. Yet, in our discussions, she was missing essential needs, such as, love, comfort, and attention.

**Meaning emerged.** For the first time in Finn’s life, he could recall he felt like he may not have enough and in his current situation this meaning aligned with a food-related understanding. His version of having enough was associated with ensuring he had three meals a day. Even though he had access to a campus meal plan, it did not provide enough for him. A similar concern was seen in a survey of students conducted at 26 four-year institutions (Dubick, Mathews, & Cady, 2016). Forty-three percent of students were still reporting food insecurity, even when enrolled in a campus meal plan. Often students

had enrolled in a meal plan offering between 7-14 meals a week (Dubick et al., 2016). In Finn's case, this required him to seek additional resources to procure food, when originally, he assumed his meal plan would provide enough. In being introduced to the pantry by his advisor, he now had access to enough for this academic year.

For Zipporah, having enough aligned with fending for herself. This was part of the independence she had instilled in herself when beginning college. She did not want to rely on anyone for help financially and wanted to figure it out herself. Interactions she had with campus support services and pantry workers helped in making her financial independence more acceptable and manageable. They provided a listening ear and allowed her to become more aware of other on-campus support. Having enough provided meaning surrounding both food and financial needs. She believed this to be a crucial part of the college experience, and thus became resourceful in how she obtained help when financial challenges arose.

For Agatha, having enough meant providing plenty for she and Noelle, both in nourishment and other aspects of their lives. Having enough looked and felt different than the life of abundance in which she grew up. Her interactions with others, especially her mom, create tension around what she needs versus what others think she may need. A realization has been created, given new meaning to what is enough for she and Noelle. When looking back, she realized having enough and living in a world of abundance included space for not having enough of other important aspects of her life, specifically from her parents. In her interactions with her daughter, listening to what she needed, allowed Agatha to understand what to provide Noelle and ensure she had plenty.

**Meaning modified.** Having enough now was given new meaning based on Finn's financial challenges in the first few weeks of fall semester. In defining this term, he could identify what allowed him to have enough between his meal plan and what the food pantry provided. In doing so, he began using the campus food pantry; sometimes for items he needed, a snack, and other times for things he wanted, a coffeemaker.

Given Zipporah's current financial situation, she had never felt like she did not have enough, yet had been concerned her variety would be lacking until she began using the food pantry weekly. Having enough aligned with being satisfied and Zipporah had given new meaning to this term due to being satisfied differently than in the past. She was challenged by having to find money for the things she needed and wanted. Zipporah always had plenty growing up and now she had to weigh options which often left her with not what she had hoped for, but still satisfied with what she had as an option at that moment.

Giving the circumstances which occurred in Agatha's life, meaning of having enough changed dramatically in her adult years. Meaning shifted due to losing a husband to heart disease and unhealthy weight, which began to impact food choices and decisions she made in her home. Meaning shifted due to making the decision to quit her job and ultimately sacrifice additional income for the cost of being there for Noelle. However, now having enough included ensuring adequate food, clothing, fun activities, Christmas gifts, monies for school activities, and other events for her daughter. The list continued to grow and Agatha was concerned she could not keep up with demands. The magnitude of her current situation, at times, was hidden from others, indicating she experienced

shame and loneliness around ensuring enough for her family. Aspects of this were apparent when she could not provide me with photographs during data collection. I believe photographs were a reminder of her current situation and she was not willing to share this visual aspect of her reality with others, including myself. However, she would not trade how she was living now with what she had growing up, because she knew the importance of consistent love, comfort, and attention for Noelle.

### **Addressing Research Questions Using Symbolic Interactionism**

The research questions developed as part of this research design aimed to provide insight into students' experience with food insecurity and using a campus food pantry. I also sought to gain understanding around how they use foods received and if their food choices or diet quality were impacted due to their experience with food insecurity or the use of the campus food pantry. In this section, I use SI to provide additional understanding around the research questions presented. The research questions addressed the themes at varying levels developed during data analysis, and together, enhance meaning students give to their experience of food insecurity and their use of a campus food pantry.

#### **Participants' Meaning of their Experience with Food Insecurity**

The first research question, how participants' make meaning of their experience with food insecurity, was asked to gain knowledge of the day-to-day experiences of participants who are food insecure and thus, have struggles with food access. Within this inquiry, I found participants did not use the term food insecure to describe their



experience. Aspects of this term, individuals struggling with consistent access to adequate food often because of insufficient resources, was apparent in their experiences. Though participants struggled at times, with access, adequacy, and sufficient resources, the meaning they gave to this experience was not confined to this term.

Meaning given to their experience with food insecurity was complex and included defining what having enough meant for each participant and considering how their experience fit within the confines of the term food insecurity. This was a new concept, which two of the three participants had not heard in the past. Using SI as a framework, I describe how this meaning was initially defined, emerged due to interactions with me throughout the research process, and was ultimately modified over time.

Having enough became a term used to define participants' experience with food insecurity. Having enough varied based on their past and present experiences and interactions in their own world prior to college. This meaning of having enough discussed during dialogue created between participants and myself shaped the understanding they gave to food insecurity. To have enough was to be food secure.

When reviewing and introducing the concept of food insecurity, none of the participants defined their situation as food insecure initially. Finn and Agatha identified with aspects of food insecurity after discussion with me. Zipporah did not identify her situation as food insecure even after we discussed this concept in depth.

Agatha realized she had to strategize budget priorities and resources to increase access to adequate food options. To do this, she moved money around to ensure enough and thus, provided plenty for Noelle. This required forming new relationships and

interactions with other moms and being an integral part of school events allowing Noelle and her to get closer to food. Finances were always a concern in this process, though in budgeting strategically she never ran out. She often allowed herself limited access by cutting the size of meals or eating less than she should, to provide enough for Noelle.

Finn had recently experienced components of this term which he did not align with food insecurity until prompted by me. He had been worried he may not have money to buy more food in the beginning of the semester and he began to worry his snack options would run out. The balance of his third meal of the day was impacted, which was not included as part of his meal plan. During our conversations understanding around this term was given new meaning, as he never thought of his current situation as an access concern. Though he did not use food insecurity to describe his current situation since using the campus food pantry as an additional food resource, he had experienced aspects of limited access and inadequate food options because of insufficient resources.

Zipporah believed this term and definition did not define her initially and as discussions continued with me. When discussing components of this definition she still did not identify with food insecurity. The pantry allowed sufficient resources and she always had access to food, though variety lacked at times. Her food options were adequate, they just may not be balanced at each meal. She began to think about her situation in a new way as she focused on accessing new resources. Fending for herself included ensuring enough food, which she did for her given needs; though she was left not getting what she wanted, but often still satisfied.

When I initially thought about students experiencing food insecurity, I thought they would have heard the term and identified with this concept. This was not the case with Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha. Though this term is used with scholars and stakeholders involved in addressing food insecurity and hunger on HEIs' campuses, it is not always a common term with the students' using the resources provided.

### **Participants' Meaning of their Experience with a Campus Food Pantry**

Questions were asked about participants' meaning of their experience of using the campus food pantry, how interactions with others influenced this meaning, and how participants meaning evolved over time to gain understanding of what participants experience when asking for help and using this resource. Within this inquiry, I found participants meaning evolved due to their current financial situation. All participants interacted with an individual on campus, an advisor or other support service on campus, who recognized their need for additional food access and financial support prompting initial use of the pantry.

They were not aware of this resource being an option until encouraged. Initially their experience with using the pantry felt weird, like a hand-out, and reluctance, for Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha, respectively. Meaning participants gave to the campus food pantry was influenced by interactions with others at the pantry, such as student workers, staff, and participants' peers. Zipporah and Agatha associated a comforting and welcoming nature to their experience with using the pantry, due to these interactions. Finn and Zipporah both visited the pantry with friends and this allowed for a feeling of

normalcy to be created, providing assurance others were in a similar situation; they were “not in it alone.” These interactions influenced how meaning was modified over time.

The meaning they gave to their experience was modified as their use of the pantry became more consistent. As the pantry came to fill a void in their life, meaning changed. They defined their experience with using the campus food pantry as a necessary resource and strategy allowing them to prioritize their budget. This resource filled a physical void for all and a social void for Zipporah, in particular. Physically they could have access to more food which assisted their weekly intake and Zipporah used the pantry to socialize with friends, do homework, and occasionally volunteer her time to help shelf items in the pantry. Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha thought of the food pantry at the end of the semester as a back-up plan, a self-care strategy, and a safety net, respectively. Their financial challenges drove their usage of the campus food pantry, and ultimately the meaning given to this experience.

### **Impact of Foods Received**

The research question, how do participants’ meaning of their experience with food insecurity and the campus food pantry impact how they utilize foods received, was asked to gain understanding of how meaning participants’ give to these experiences impact foods or ingredients received and utilized. Within this inquiry, I found participants each had a specific reason for going to the pantry, filling a need within their diet on a weekly basis. Initially, they all just took items they thought would fit into their diet. They began to navigate how the pantry could best be used weekly by assessing

common items they could receive most of the time, and additional perishable items purchased by the pantry GA, which were available on a first come, first serve basis.

For Finn, this included supplementing two meals with snacks, such as peanut butter and granola bars; for Zipporah, enhancing non-perishables in her home pantry, with items such as spaghetti sauce, meat, eggs, and milk to make small meals or snacks; and for Agatha providing additional items for meals, stretching her current budget. This was least influenced by interactions with others, because there was an individual intention in what they needed and thus, received from the pantry each week. This was not directly influenced by others, though was driven by what was available, provided by donations, and weekly grocery shopping trips by the pantry GA.

What they received was modified over time as they learned what the pantry offered, when the pantry GA shopped and stocked items were more plentiful, enhancing variety received from the pantry. Ultimately, the campus food pantry allowed them to have enough of what they needed, thus, satisfying meaning they gave to food insecurity over time by establishing a feeling of food security.

### **Impact on Food Choices and Diet Quality**

This research question, how participants' meaning of their experience with food insecurity and the campus food pantry impact their food choices and diet quality, was asked to gain understanding of how participants' meaning of these experiences impact their food decisions and the quality of this food. Within this inquiry, I found participants used the pantry to ensure they had enough, though this required compromising health due to cost, convenience, and satiety. They all had meaning they gave to health and the

quality of items they sought to include in their diet, yet due to their financial challenges, using the food pantry as an additional resource may be their only other choice for the week.

Depending on what was available, their choices and quality of products received may be limited. This inquiry was less influenced by interactions with others, because food choices and diet quality consideration were individually driven and based on the needs of each participant. Finn and Zipporah only had to feed themselves, thus chose what they needed and wanted based on their budget and availability of foods; while Agatha had to feed both Noelle and herself, which required her considering what Noelle needed or wanted and assessing her budget to meet those requests.

Finn initially based his choices on added fuel for his third meal of the day. These were often snacks which provided carbohydrate, some protein and fat, but were low in fruits, vegetables and dairy, thus missing essential vitamins and minerals. However, the goal of supplementing this third meal aligned with cost, convenience, and satiety. The food pantry had no cost attached to it, was conveniently located next to his residence hall, and items received provided a sense of satiety, he would not have without them. Thus, the food pantry as a back-up plan, provided enough of what he needed: three meals a day. Meaning given to his food choices and diet quality shifted as he began to use the food pantry and strategized budget priorities. His meals obtained from the dining hall should include additional variety he did not receive from the snack foods. He realized this as the semester went on and was more intentional in his meal planning when using the dining hall.

Zipporah initially based her choices on increasing variety, ensuring she considered items she had at home and how choices she made would pair best with these items. Her food choices were influenced by cost, convenience, and satiety. Convenience also considered time and transportation. The food pantry had no cost attached to it, was conveniently located on campus, and items received helped supplement her non-perishable items, providing additional satiety. She lacked fruit and vegetable access and often a variety of proteins which left her redefining balanced meals in her weekly meal planning. The food pantry, as a self-care resource, provided enough of what she needed, leaving her feeling physically and socially satisfied, and proud she could fend for herself.

Agatha wanted to ensure Noelle and she had enough by providing plenty, thus she initially based her choices on supplementing meals and snacks, allowing her to stretch her budget. She tried to choose healthier options, such as brown rice, quinoa or canned fruits, and these options were influenced by cost, convenience, and satiety. The food pantry had no cost attached to it, it was conveniently located on campus and her choices provided additional satiety, in particular when she sought out sources of fiber. The food pantry as a safety net allowed her to strategize budget priorities among other resources, such as grocery and retail outlets, for items which appear healthier, such as brown eggs. This made her feel she provided higher quality items than what she could afford, while still providing plenty. Meaning she gave to food insecurity and the campus food pantry allowed her to consider variety and be more resourceful and mindful in her approach to health now than in the past.

### **Theoretical Implications Summary**

In this section, I provided interpretation on the overall themes and the specific research questions using SI as a framework to further define how meaning is made and the circumstances driving variations among their meaning. I could see how participants' experiences overlapped between themes identified. By applying theory, I gained greater understanding into the multidimensional features of their experiences with food insecurity and using a campus food pantry and the following summary provides further explanation for Figure 1.

Participants' meanings overlapped at times yet defined their own situation. Each brought cultural, historical, and social context to the stories they shared with me. Though similarities among participants' experiences existed, they remained housed under different circumstances. The context of Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha's story encompassed meaning made surrounding food insecurity and campus food pantry use.

Finn, Zipporah and Agatha's situation were guided by their financial challenges. These challenges were driven by their financial independence, which propelled them to begin strategizing budget priorities. In strategizing, they each had to develop a plan among all purchasing decisions, including types and amounts of food eaten, social activities, and how any income they made played into these decisions. The meaning surrounding strategizing budget priorities was influenced by participants' financial challenges, and required meaning to be made around negotiation, sacrificing, and resourcefulness. Financial independence connected these two themes. Because of their financial independence, they had financial challenges which required them to strategize



budget priorities. These features allowed participants to have enough and this was defined differently by each participant.

Financial challenges drove usage of the food pantry. A gap was filled, which allowed Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha to shift some of their finances to another sector of their budget. The pantry also met their needs in other ways, and meaning made included, the pantry being a back-up plan, a safety net, and a self-care resource, allowing for enough.

Financial challenges required at times, compromising health as a priority. Within their budgets, they included space for considering the healthfulness of foods they choose, yet their financial strains required them to manage their meal planning differently, while considering cost, convenience, and satiety of foods they chose. These challenges allowed new meaning to be made around meal planning, including, balancing meals and ensuring adequate variety.

Though they may not have been comfortable at times with their financial challenges, they identified this as a “new normal.” This was part of the process and solutions were found to allow them to adapt to their current situation. It would change and their long-term career goals, family, friends, and perseverance assisted in helping them see beyond these circumstances.

In considering this overview of theme connections using SI as a lens, stakeholders can understand initial meaning students gave to their experiences, and be conscious of the cultural, historical, and social context of the student’s situation prior to attending college to best meet students’ needs. Many students do not come to college identifying with food

insecurity. Circumstances occurring during their transition to college often have a financial component; they are now faced with additional strains, including access to food and other basic needs requiring assistance from their HEI.

As meaning begins to emerge, students must find strategies assisting them financially, often requiring interactions with others, providing on-campus and off-campus resources to meet their needs. Options include finding a job to provide additional income, often at a food establishment, that can provide a meal; using campus support services, such as the campus food pantry or local food bank; finding on-campus and off-campus sources for free food, or finding support among friends. As well, considering budgeting appropriately for purchases made at grocery stores or retail outlets. Depending on student's budgetary restrictions, food choices may be limited and can further impact students' social, physical, and mental health status.

As meaning evolves over time, students consider the boundaries of their financial independence and impending challenges. Within these restrictions, they gain understanding of what is enough to meet their needs. Enough varies and is redefined during this process. What may have been enough prior to college, changes dramatically during their transition, and continues to be modified as their budget is altered or new strategies are considered.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

In this section, I provide implications based on the themes described during data analysis and using SI as a lens. There are many considerations for stakeholders in using this research to assist their own campus food pantry as a student support service. Within

each implication various theme characteristics are presented. Implications include: a) developing a food security assessment tool; b) collaboration with various departments; and c) maximizing resource utilization.

Though this research study focused on food insecurity, there are resources available and a need to support general basic needs security. These implications consider a multidisciplinary approach to addressing and redefining solutions to students' greatest financial needs. Resources on campuses are being developed to consider food access, yet also housing options, transportation, child care, and insurance assistance (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2014). At Oregon State University, the Human Resources Service Center is not limited to a food pantry, yet includes access to laundry, showers, and short-term housing options. Investing in programming that can assist students varied financial needs while enrolled in a HEI can provide confidence and support, impacting them beyond degree completion (Goldrick-Rab et al., 2017).

### **Developing a Food Security Assessment Tool**

The conversation on what food insecurity may mean, resulted in subsequent discussions on having enough and allowed for an opportunity to reflect on a discrepancy. Prevalence studies reported various percentages of students who were food insecure using the AFSMM food security module (Chapparo et al., 2009; Gaines et al., 2014; Maroto et al., 2015; Patton-Lopez et al., 2014). Through this common tool has been used with adults, (Bickel et al., 2000) it often does not get at what students may be really struggling with, including strategizing different food access opportunities, sacrifices, day-to-day struggles, fears, uncertainties, and vulnerabilities.

Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha did not think of themselves as food insecure prior to discussing this term. Finn and Zipporah had never heard the term, and Finn and Agatha, in reviewing the AFSMM for food security were categorized as low food security.

Discrepancies lend itself to confusion and misconception: students may not identify as food insecure, yet are being labeled as such due to the use of a common tool to measure household food insecurity prevalence nationwide. Quick and easy to administer, this tool pinpoints aspects of food insecurity, but may be missing key components of students' struggle. It accurately assesses prevalence of food insecurity using various indicator questions capturing features among levels of food insecurity (Bickel et al., 2000). It has been helpful in identifying prevalence on campuses nationwide, but is not equipped to address the magnitude of individual situations, considering the multidimensional nature of food insecurity. In the future, this is an additional consideration which programming at HEIs could begin targeting.

Food insecurity had begun to define student's struggle and give it context, though Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha had various components, which contributed to their use of the campus food pantry. Many individuals, have instilled a sense of accomplishment when deciding to attend college and are driven, motivated, and determined to succeed and persist through college for various reasons; even if this choice leads to additional financial struggles (Dubick et al., 2016). Adding the expenses and expectations of college into the equation enhance financial strains, yet offers the possibility of providing an opportunity to capture additional information and potential need, which is not portrayed in prevalence studies (Dubick et al., 2016).

How students define their situation should be evaluated, because students may not identify with food insecurity. Thus, a question can be indicated on a health form for newly enrolled students, helping to identify the level of food insecurity at their institution. As stakeholders move forward in addressing campus food insecurity, hunger, and other basic needs resources for students, consideration needs to be given to using an appropriate assessment tool. In understanding students' needs, their struggles with finances, food, housing, transportation, tuition, and the implications of their current financial strains, stakeholders could better provide what they actually need instead of what one thinks they need. The assessment tool would be in addition to an initial health form and begin to capture multidimensional features of individual's situations. If there was a certain student concern with food access, based on the health form, this assessment tool would be used via the health services center or other appropriate department on-campus.

Next, HEIs would then begin to assist students identifying their level of need and assistance by aligning students with existing support services which meet their diverse needs. These services may need to tailor their programming accordingly, as they work closely with these students. This collaboration and coordination may already be in place at a given institution, though it would be advantageous to reassess program impacts and outcomes.

To identify these needs, a transparent, open dialogue can be created between students using the campus food pantry and stakeholders involved in assisting them. There are challenges in having this dialogue including: staffing, size of institution,

privacy, and stigma. Ideally, an assessment tool can assist in narrowing students who need increased support, and the type of support they need. A system would need to be put into place to capture first-year, transfer, and existing students. There continues to be a need for students who are hungry and struggling financially, yet how this is addressed could be more individualized and based on student's most pressing concerns.

### **Department Collaboration**

Financial situations influence student's opportunity for persistence or for additional support from the university should be considered. Financial challenges are intertwined with other aspects of an individual's life, thus by collaborating with various departments on campus, students could have access to a variety of support services. The sooner an intervention to assist and ensure students are on the right track throughout their college career is crucial.

When a campus food pantry can collaborate with various departments on campus more support for students is given and communication is strengthened between the various support services. Stakeholders at HEIs involved in campus food pantries can collaborate allowing education, additional support services, and strategic solutions to sustain this resource on campuses. Developing an advisory committee with representation from various departments on campus can begin a conversation on how to best support students needing support services. An assessment tool should be considered to identify the scope and magnitude of the issue on a given campus, as stated earlier in this section. Data provided from this tool can assist in identifying who the key collaborators are at the HEI. Brainstorming and planning may allow for additional

opportunities on campus, with which the campus food pantry is assisting in and giving back. Students can be invited to serve on this committee, pantry users or not, for the student voice to continue to be heard.

Many of the food pantry directors I spoke with during my exploratory study discussed the importance of an advisory committee, though not all currently had this committee in place. A committee could allow them to expand their campus food pantry to other areas of campus and foster collaborations; a key factor to moving the pantry forward. Within the California State University system, three of the five institutions reviewed offered an advisory committee. These committees addressed issues surrounding the campus food pantry and included, faculty, health center staff, student government, off-campus representative from local food pantries, education opportunity programs, the Dean of Students office, Housing and Residence Life, and Office of Financial Aid (Crutchfield et al., 2016). Having buy-in from stakeholders, including upper-level administrators allows a new or established food pantry continued momentum and sustainability, shifting focus to putting the student first in all aspects of their college experience.

### **Maximizing Resource Utilization**

Several recommendations could be addressed within campus food pantries to maximize this resource on campuses. Making students more aware of the services provided from the pantry can help in increasing use of this service for those who need additional financial assistance and basic needs support. These could include campus announcements via email; a visit to the pantry during orientation; a campus food pantry

open house inviting faculty and their classes to visit and see what this support service offers and why this service is available; reminders through the financial aid office; the campus food pantry director visiting with clubs and organizations and various classes on campus throughout the semester; and finally, students being reminded of the support services available during advisor check-ins prior to registration for the following semester. At any point, faculty, administrators, and staff could recommend students who they may be concerned about to the health services center using an anonymous form, which provides an alert to this campus support service to reach out to these students. The goal is to ensure students are receiving the maximum support they are able from their HEI for success.

In addition to reaching the needs of more students the pantry can provide additional resources students could utilize. Each campus has different budgets and varying resources; however, I provide a few suggestions which could be used depending on how long the campus food pantry has been open. These include incorporating: a) a software tracking system; b) educational resources; c) a mobile application; d) social space; and e) offering a support group.

**Software tracking system.** Campus food pantries can establish a tracking system software at their location. It can track student's usage, items received, student characteristics, and popular items. It provides data the HEI can use to assist with budgeting and tax purposes or long-term strategic goals and sustainability (CUFBA, 2016). Obviously, an intake form could be created, if not already to be filled out by pantry users during initial usage.



A tracking system can also be a location to insert a feedback form and answers can be sorted accordingly for easy access and data reporting. A feedback form is often used to gain information on what students are receiving from the pantry, what additional services could be offered, and what students liked best about using the food pantry (CUFBA, 2016). A feedback form could be included as part of the “check-out” when using the food pantry. These answers could be provided one-on-one via the individual “checking-out” the student or could be answered using a tablet or computer in the pantry office. It could decrease any discomfort students may have with sharing their thoughts with student volunteers or other graduate student assistants.

**Educational resources.** Campus food pantries can provide quality educational resources, which consider student's well-being. Since each campus food pantry varies in size and reach, adaptations surrounding integrating education resources, such as providing context for food insecurity and hunger, nutrition, and basic cooking skills could be considered. Evaluating staffing needs and potential collaborations will assist campus food pantries with the education and delivery model, which ones work best to meet their needs. Depending on campus food pantries' available resources, the development of all resources at once may not be reasonable however, a combination could maximize benefits for the pantry user population.

Considering participants did not identify with the term food insecurity, it may be helpful for stakeholders to consider how students define their situation. It could be captured in the assessment tool described earlier, however I include it with educational resources because this can provide an opportunity to educate and empower students. For

example, at the RMI pantry, new information had been placed at the entrance of the pantry discussing what food insecurity is and issues with hunger on campus. The information though important and potentially useful, may not be aligned with the type of resources surrounding aspects of hunger and food insecurity students need. The most effective way to engage students with these concepts should be considered. Financial management, counseling services, nutrition and food preparation skills, and access to other on-campus and local support services are suggested as areas stakeholder can consider focusing their time and efforts. In this section, I focus on nutrition and food preparation education resources and address how to include financial management, counseling and other services in a later section.

Finn, Zipporah, and Agatha all spoke of considering and prioritizing health. They recognized the pantry offered healthier options and if available considered these as part of their 10 items for the week. Finn and Zipporah like to cook, and Agatha did not. Cooking and preparing meals always required time, space, and equipment. HEIs could capitalize on the opportunity to educate students on proper nutrition and basic cooking skills meeting students at their various skill and education levels.

Nutrition and culinary education resources can offer a range of topics for individuals depending on where students are in terms of motivation and behavior change. It is important to consider what individuals value to provide consistent and meaningful messaging. Programming can emphasize and provide social support to their clientele (Levoke & Wakefield, 2011). A similar model designed at various HEIs could serve their student population with programming, encompassing the breadth of health and

wellness challenges among these unique, busy individuals. Resources could allow for more consistent interactions with a targeted group of students using the campus food pantry.

Research studies have used diet interventions, smart supermarket shopping strategies, nutrition education sessions on portion control, individual goal setting, food-purchasing strategies on a limited income, and basic cooking skills (Hoisington et al., 2002; Larson, Perry, Story, & Sztainer, 2006; Raynor, Kilanowski, Esterlis, & Epstein, 2002; Wigg-Damman & Smith, 2009). Gaining confidence in the kitchen and enhanced culinary skills empower students to prepare healthy meals, providing a sense of personal achievement and accomplishment (Levy & Auld, 2004), and allowing individuals to participate in meaningful, social relationships (Scharf, Levkoe, & Saul, 2010). Within the California State University system, two schools offered cooking classes through their campus food pantry, using appliances commonly found in a residence hall kitchen. Students leave with the ingredients and recipes to create a meal at home (Crutchfield et al., 2016).

Recommendations for campus food pantries include collaborating with a nutrition or health and wellness department, food service management, or business and finance department on campus. A business department can provide financial management and budgeting resources for students. Incorporating innovative ways to bring a kitchen to campus, if there is a restricted budget for this programming; for example, a food truck could be brought on campus to offer lunch to faculty, staff and students, and in return could provide space for an on-site cooking class for pantry users.

Incorporation of nutrition education material can occur as part of curriculum development for an undergraduate or graduate class. These students could pilot the education material as part of a class assignment or internship project and include a needs assessment of the students' using the campus food pantry. Evaluation material could be included as part of the pilot to determine effectiveness of material. An education department could assist with curriculum development and insight on appropriate tailoring of messages for the given audience.

One toolkit useful in initial incorporation of nutrition and culinary education is the *Cooking Matters in Your Food Pantry Manual*. Share our Strength's is an organization that helps families shop and cook balanced meals on a budget with their Cooking Matters training programs (Share our Strength's Cooking Matters, 2014). The toolkit was designed for individuals working in food pantries to encourage healthy food choices and provide tips, activities, and recipes used to execute a successful food-based demonstration while introducing appropriate nutrition messages (Share our Strength's Cooking Matters, 2014). Sample topics include stocking a healthy pantry, eating a variety of foods from all food groups, and comparing labels to make healthier choices (Share our Strength's Cooking Matters, 2014).

The *Cooking Matters in Your Food Pantry Manual* utilizes recipes reflecting a variety of food groups to support healthier habits. The recipes are low-cost, limit the use of tools and equipment, are quick to prepare, and consider healthier cooking techniques. All recipes include serving sizes, materials, and nutrition analysis information. Sample

recipes include a pasta and stir-fry dinner option, black bean and vegetable quesadillas, Moroccan carrot salad, and turkey tacos (Share our Strength's Cooking Matters, 2014).

Nutrition knowledge can assist in increasing understanding of what types of food to include in a healthy diet, while culinary skills develop how to prepare these foods. Both promote social interaction, self-care, and can provide dietary support when included regularly in one's life (Scharf et al., 2010; Levy & Auld, 2004). These actionable items can empower individuals to consider their health and its impacts on their own lives.

**A mobile application.** Offering a mobile application where students could access via their phone or tablet could be a way for the campus food pantry to communicate with students using the pantry. A mobile application could allow for consistent, unobtrusive messaging and content providing a virtual hub of resources, and can be offered as a reminder they have support and are “not in it alone.” The application could also be an option to make students more aware of this service on their given campus. Downloading an application for all campus support services students may need during their first-year, could remind students this service is available as needed throughout the semester.

The application could provide information on current inventory, including grocery shopping days for the pantry, a featured new item of the week, or a featured seasonal fruit or vegetable of the month. This application could also share a variety of resources which have been incorporated via the many collaborations on campus. Sample recipes in addition to those offered at the nutrition and culinary educations, weekly or bi-monthly nutrition education resources, and guest support service provider of the month are a few additional samples of information which can be shared. As well, information provided

through the application could include advisory committee meeting schedules, financial tips, and events on campus offering free food. Within the California State University system, a cell phone application was initiated for students to be notified when caterings on campus were complete and food was available (Crutchfield et al., 2016). These leftovers can be offered to students instead of contributing to the problem of solid food waste.

**Support group.** It is important to consider what current students using the campus pantry could do to provide for those who are just beginning to use this service. Zipporah described this as a way of giving back. A support group could be developed allowing new and current users to build and maintain relationships around a similar situation. A support group would allow current student users an opportunity to give back to the campus food pantry, not with a monetary offering or a food donation but with themselves via time and expertise. It could continue to reduce stigma around using the campus food pantry, allowing pantry users to realize the collaborative, welcoming nature of this support service. They could share their story, showing others they are “not in it alone”, and destigmatizing feelings which may be associated with using the campus food pantry. These opportunities allow additional assistance for students to make the use of the food pantry more acceptable and part of their college experience, and less shameful.

A support group could provide an opportunity for counseling contact hours as a student support service on campus. These individuals could be in collaboration with a health service center via their counseling services branch or a collaboration via the financial aid office. Including an opportunity to provide education on budgetary planning

and strategies students can use to access food both on and off-campus can be beneficial. Students in this study could strategize and meet their needs effectively by being resourceful. Though prompted by advisors and other campus support services, if housed in one place, students could have access to these resources sooner than later to assist their financial situations.

A support group could include inviting guest speakers or facilitators from different departments on campus, who can answer questions or provide expertise in different disciplines, addressing students' concerns and needs. Each month a new on-campus support service can be featured to visit the pantry and hold consultations there. Creating a one stop shop for students ensures their transition is as smooth as possible, supporting an opportunity for college completion.

**Social space.** Educations, support groups, and advisory board meetings could be held in a designated space in the campus food pantry building or an adjacent space. If monies allowed and depending on space and access to kitchen facilities, the campus food pantry could be an additional service for those living on campus and commuters to use as a lounge. Offering additional reasons students may visit the pantry, can drive overall use for those who need this service. Making the space more social and inviting, allows an opportunity for students to accept this resource as part of their college experience; a positive influence, not a shameful aspect. At one campus food pantry, the food pantry director highlighted how stigma was reduced, when a room at the campus food pantry, was used as a small heat and serve kitchen. Students could use the refrigerator,

microwave, sit at the table and eat lunch, stay warm during colder temperatures, and socialize (C. Martin, personal communication, September 7, 2016).

Feeling welcome, and interacting with new and old friends is an important part of the campus food pantry for participants. If students know they are welcome, have someone to talk to, and who will listen, they may be more inclined to use the campus food pantry. Coupling a welcoming and educational environment with student food pantries, may strengthen students' paths to persistence, assisting in addressing challenges. Participants had not lost hope for obtaining a degree because they each had a specific reason and career path envisioned for themselves, yet the stamina they had to endure was taxing at times and could lead to feelings of frustration, uncertainty, and exhaustion. In providing a listening ear via resources offered through the campus food pantry, students have continued support, providing them with a matrix of on-campus resources to support their success.

### **Implications Summary**

In this section, I discussed implications which could be considered based on this research study. This is not an exhaustive list. Some HEIs whose campus food pantry have been established for many years, may have included variations of these implications, and new campus food pantries are still in the learning and logistical stage. Regardless of the level of engagement of the campus food pantry, it is important to consider each students' needs, recognizing the topic of food insecurity may be new or foreign to them. Considering an appropriate assessment tool, collaborating with various



departments, and considering ways to maximize individual campuses' food pantry use are implications stakeholders should consider for sustainability.

### **Future Research Considerations**

With any research study, there is room for additional research avenues. In using purposeful convenience sampling, all effort was used to ensure a diverse participant pool by providing an opportunity for all students who used the campus food pantry. The pantry GA intentionally choose a diverse group of individuals considering demographics, and non-traditional student criteria. However, when working with gatekeepers, the researcher could be limited to participants willing to share and who are accessible.

Participants may have limited what they shared with the researcher about their story depending on the setting. In establishing a transparent relationship with participants, I offered the option for a safe, comfortable setting for them to share their experiences. My presence and the collaborative relationship which was part of the research design may not have aligned with participants' personality or comfort level. Participants may not have shared parts of their story because they were not comfortable with the setting or relationship. In the future, obtaining additional diversity among participants and providing additional time and space to build rapport should be considered.

Using a single data collection method can limit interpretation of findings. I intentionally included three different methods, written, spoken, and visual, to ensure participants could portray their stories in a variety of ways. If they were not comfortable with one method, then I hoped to capture the aspect of their story via another method. In

using three methods, I hoped to provide greater understanding surrounding the research questions, which may be limited if only choosing one method. However, there are other methods which were not included and could add to this body of knowledge, such as focus groups, other visual methods, and observations at the campus food pantry (Mertens, 2015). I selected the methods which best aligned with my research design.

I was clear about my perspectives, values, and beliefs throughout the process. By considering criteria for rigor and including peer debriefing, I ensured my biases did not limit the integrity of restorying, which occurred during data analysis. Participants knew my background, views and understanding of food insecurity and campus food pantries, as well as my personal food experiences. Knowing this information can also sway the information participants' share with me; though in asking questions different ways, building a rapport, and member checking, every effort was made to ensure the integrity of their story remains intact (Creswell, 2013).

Other considerations for future research include determining the number of participants to align with data collection methods. Additional participants, representing more segments of the student body and a broader geographical area would have strengthened the data collected. However, given the sampling pool available and the arduous nature of this type of data collection for participants, it is not unusual to have a small sample. The data from this study does add to the understanding of an increasingly common HEI issue. Future studies should endeavor to include a larger sample.

One location was chosen for data collection, additional locations with varying institutional characteristics should be considered. Including varying enrollment sizes,

rural versus urban colleges, and state versus non-state colleges could offer a more comprehensive view of student's perspective on this issue. It is crucial the different support services offered to students, including food pantry programming and varying pantry models be targeted and evaluated for best practices and limitations; identifying what these programs need to best meet their student's population needs. In the future, interviewing and observing a variety of food pantries and food pantry directors would give an even more comprehensive approach to studying the topic of students' campus food pantry use.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this section, I have provided further interpretation and theoretical implications, highlighting specific connections within each theme. This allowed for understanding of meanings provided to a) financial challenges; b) strategizing budget priorities; c) prioritizing health; d) food pantry utilization; and e) having enough. I then applied SI to the specific research questions to show how these were answered as meaning emerged and evolved during the research process. I provided implications for stakeholders at HEIs, including: a) developing a food security assessment tool; b) collaborating with different departments; and c) maximizing the use of the food pantry as a resource for students. Finally, I offered considerations for future research and practice opportunities.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**ACRONYM LIST**

### **Acronyms Used Throughout Document**

- HEI – Higher Education Institution
- SNAP – Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
- USDA – United States Department of Agriculture
- FNS – Food and Nutrition Services
- NCES – National Center for Education Statistics
- CNPP – Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion
- ERS – Economic Research Service
- USDE – United States Department of Education
- RMI – Rocky Mountain Institution

**APPENDIX B**  
**CAMPUS FOOD PANTRY PHOTOGRAPHS**



Non-perishable Items in the food pantry



Non-perishable Items in the food pantry





Toiletry Items in the food pantry



Freezer items at the food pantry prior to grocery shopping day



**APPENDIX C**  
**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION**  
**IN RESEARCH**



## **CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH**

### **UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO**

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring meaning of food insecurity among HEI students and their utilization of campus food assistance programs. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

#### **Introduction**

You have been asked to provide your consent for a research study being conducted by a doctoral student in the Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership program at the University of Northern Colorado. Before you consent to this study, it is important that you read about and understand the study and the procedures it involves. This consent form will explain the project to you in detail. If you have any questions about the study or your role in it, be sure to ask the researcher. If you have more questions at a later time, feel free to contact the researcher.

This consent document may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the researcher to explain anything that you do not understand. You may take an unsigned copy of this consent document in order to think about this research study before making your decision.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore narratives of food insecure students who use campus food assistance programs offered by a HEI in the Rocky Mountain region. This research study will focus on engaging with participants, while discussing their lived experiences and the meaning they assign to various aspects of food insecurity. As well, I will investigate student's utilization of campus food assistance programs and how their food experiences influence their diet quality.

#### **Description of Procedures**

At the start of the initial interview, participant and researcher will review and complete the consent form and obtain required signatures. Participants' will be asked to participate in a minimum of three individual 120 minute semi-structured interviews discussing their

experience with food insecurity and utilizing campus food assistance programs. Each interview will be held in a space mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Interviews will be completed between the hours of 8:00 AM and 8:00 PM. Photo elicitation and participation journaling will also be required of the participants. The total time required of students is anticipated to require 12-14 hours, though this may vary between participants depending on meeting lengths, journaling and photo elicitation depth.

Several different data collection methods will be used: document analysis of participant journal entries, semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation. I will meet with participants a minimum of three times over the course of six weeks during fall 2016.

Initially we will meet to allow an opportunity for the participant to tell me about themselves and tell their story - their interests, major, day-to-day tasks, etc. Additional meetings will provide time and space to develop rapport, introduce the purpose of the research and topic to be explored and fill out consent forms and discuss the journaling and photo elicitation specifics. As well, the topic will be explored in depth via specific research questions. Throughout this process, participants will have an opportunity to discuss the journaling and photograph assignment and time for the participants to ask any additional questions or present concerns. After this data is collected, there will continue to be opportunities to clarify information provided.

### **What are the risks?**

- The risks to participants are minimal. These include breach of confidentiality. Although there is always the possibility of a breach of confidentiality, every effort will be made to protect the research data.
- It is possible participants' may experience some level of emotional stress or discomfort. If this should occur, the interviewer will stop the discussion and check in with the participant. The interviewer will remind the participant they are free to end the interview at any time, and that counseling and other resources are available to them. Contact information for both the campus and other community counseling resources will be provided on the participant consent form. If a situation arises and participants' need to speak with a counseling professional, the interviewer will offer to walk the participant to the appropriate counseling office.
- I am willing to discuss any questions you might have about these risks and discomforts.
- 

### **What are the benefits?**

- There is no direct benefit to the individual participants' other than reflection on their experiences. However, this study is beneficial because it informs stakeholders about food insecure students, their experience and how they utilize

campus food assistance programs. I believe that gaining such insight can increase our understanding of the food insecurity on university campuses and how it influences time to completion, student success and student's university experience. Such knowledge can be beneficial to administrators, students, faculty, and student affairs professionals in order to create safe and secure environments for these students and provide resources most conducive to their learning and development.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

- The results of this study may be published in scientific research journals or presented at professional conferences. However, participant names and identities will not be revealed and records will remain confidential. The risk will be kept low by coding all of the information that is collected on each participant with numbers and data files and the code list will be kept on an electronic spreadsheet that can be accessed by a password only. Hardcopy material will be locked in the researcher's office in a locked file cabinet. After all study data is collected, the master list used to link codes with participant identifiers will be shredded.
- The researcher for this study will retain consent forms for a period of three years as required by University of Northern Colorado policy. All participants' will demonstrate their verbal consent at the beginning of the first interview and will sign the written consent form prior to participation. Signed consent forms will be sealed in an envelope and locked in the researcher's office for retention purposes. Consent will be further verified verbally and recorded at the onset of each interview.
- Any computer containing participant data will be password protected to protect subject confidentiality. An additional electronic version will be accessed by password only.
- Interviews recordings will be maintained in digital format on a password protected computer and will be destroyed after transcription.
- All data will be destroyed two years following the conclusion of the study.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please complete the questionnaire if you would like to participate in this research. By completing the questionnaire, you will give us permission for your participation. You may keep this form for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May, IRB Administrator, Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

**Consent to Participate:*****Photograph Release and Waiver for Participants***

I, \_\_\_\_\_, hereby grant the researcher of this study the irrevocable right and unrestricted permission to use and publish both photographs I've taken for this research study and photographs of me, or in which I may be included, for purposes related to this research study. This grant includes the right to modify the images for presentation at the discretion of the researcher. I understand that the circulation of such materials could be worldwide and that there will be no compensation to me for this use. In granting this permission to the researcher, I am fully and without limitation releasing it from any liability that may arise from the use of the images.

If you want to participate in this study you are required to sign below as an indication of your willingness to participate:

I have read and understand the information in this form. I have been encouraged to ask questions and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have also been informed that I can withdraw from the study at any time. By signing this form, I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I also agree to allow the researchers to digitally record any and all interview sessions.

I have received a copy of this form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number and Email

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Researcher

***Photography Consent (if minors used):***

I, \_\_\_\_\_ am the legal guardian of the minor(s), \_\_\_\_\_, who have been photographed for this study. I have read and understand the provisions of this

document. I consent to the images being used as described above, and I fully enter into and agree to the above Consent and Waiver.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Legal Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Home Phone Number

*Thank you for assisting with this research*

**APPENDIX D**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL**



*Institutional Review Board*

DATE: October 27, 2016

TO: Jamie Daugherty, MS, BS

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [953885-2] The Experiences of Food Insecure Students  
Utilizing a Campus Food Assistance Program

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: October 27, 2016

EXPIRATION DATE: October 27, 2017

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB has APPROVED your submission. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an



annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of October 27, 2017.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or [Sherry.May@unco.edu](mailto:Sherry.May@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's record.

**APPENDIX E**

**SAMPLE QUESTIONS AND PHOTO  
ELICITATION PROMPTS**

### **Guide for Interviews – Sample Questions**

- Tell me about yourself (ie, age, students status, race, ethnicity, living situation and dependent status)
- What are some of your food memories?
- What are your reasons for using the campus food pantry?
- What do you perceive are the benefits to using the campus food pantry?
- How would you define food insecurity?
- How would you define food security?
- What items do you most commonly receive from the campus food pantry?
- How do you use these items in your total diet?
- What meaning or words describe your experience with food insecurity?
- What meaning or words describe your experience with using the campus food pantry?
- How have your food experiences and access to food influenced your diet?

### **Additional Follow-up Questions**

- What are your reasons for utilizing the campus food pantry?
  - What are your first thoughts regarding this service being available to students?
  - What do you recall about utilizing this service for the first time?
  - How often do you visit the campus food pantry?
  - Do you have anything else to add?
- What do you perceive as the greatest impact on your lifestyle since utilizing the campus food pantry?
  - Do you have anything else to add?

- What does food insecurity mean to you?
- What does food security mean to you?
  
- How would you define healthy eating; how would you define unhealthy eating?
  - What are impacts of healthy eating; what are impacts of unhealthy eating?
  - What factors most influence your food choices?
  - What is a barrier or motivator to healthy eating?
  - Do you have anything else to add?
  
- Are there any programs or resources that could be beneficial to you that could be offered through the campus food pantry?
  - Do you have anything else to add?
  
- The campus food pantry may be one solution, what are some other solutions you have found useful?
  - What strategies do you intent to use to move from food insecure to more food secure?
  - How will you do this?
  - How does this make you feel?
  - Do you have anything else to add?
  
- Do you have any last thoughts concerning food insecurity or the campus food pantry?

### **Photo Elicitation Instructions**

Following the initial meeting, you will be asked to take a minimum of five photographs illustrating your experience of food insecurity and how you utilize foods offered by the campus food pantry in your total diet. As well, you will be encouraged to take photographs of your diet, in general throughout the process. I will provide an example of a photograph I have taken in order to provide context for what it is I am asking you to do within this given method (See attached photograph at the end of the appendix). You will have the option to take photos with their phone or with a disposable camera that will be provided to you upon request. You will be provided with additional copies of the consent form for individuals who appear in your photo elicitation photos. See Appendix C for informed consent forms.

At the subsequent meetings, you and I will focus on the meaning of the photographs presented. The purpose of this activity is to build upon information collected in previous

meetings by creating an environment, which allows you to share your story (Creswell, 2003).



**Sample Photograph to use to explain photo elicitation**

**APPENDIX F**  
**FINN'S PHOTOGRAPHS**



The coffeemaker Finn received from the pantry – “It was used...I don’t mind.”





The coffee Finn received from the pantry



**APPENDIX G**  
**ZIPPORAH'S PHOTOGRAPHS**



Examples of snack items Zipporah chooses from the food pantry



An off-centered picture of the Teriyaki Spam





A difficult to see plate of rice and meat Zipporah cooked in her kitchen. This provides a visual for the portion size she serves herself.



Additional snack and toiletry items selected by Zipporah when I went to the campus food pantry with her.